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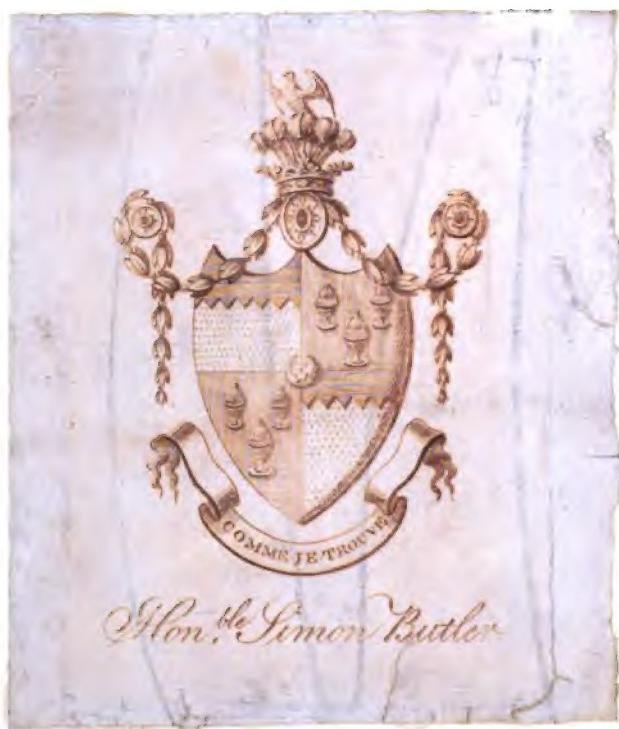
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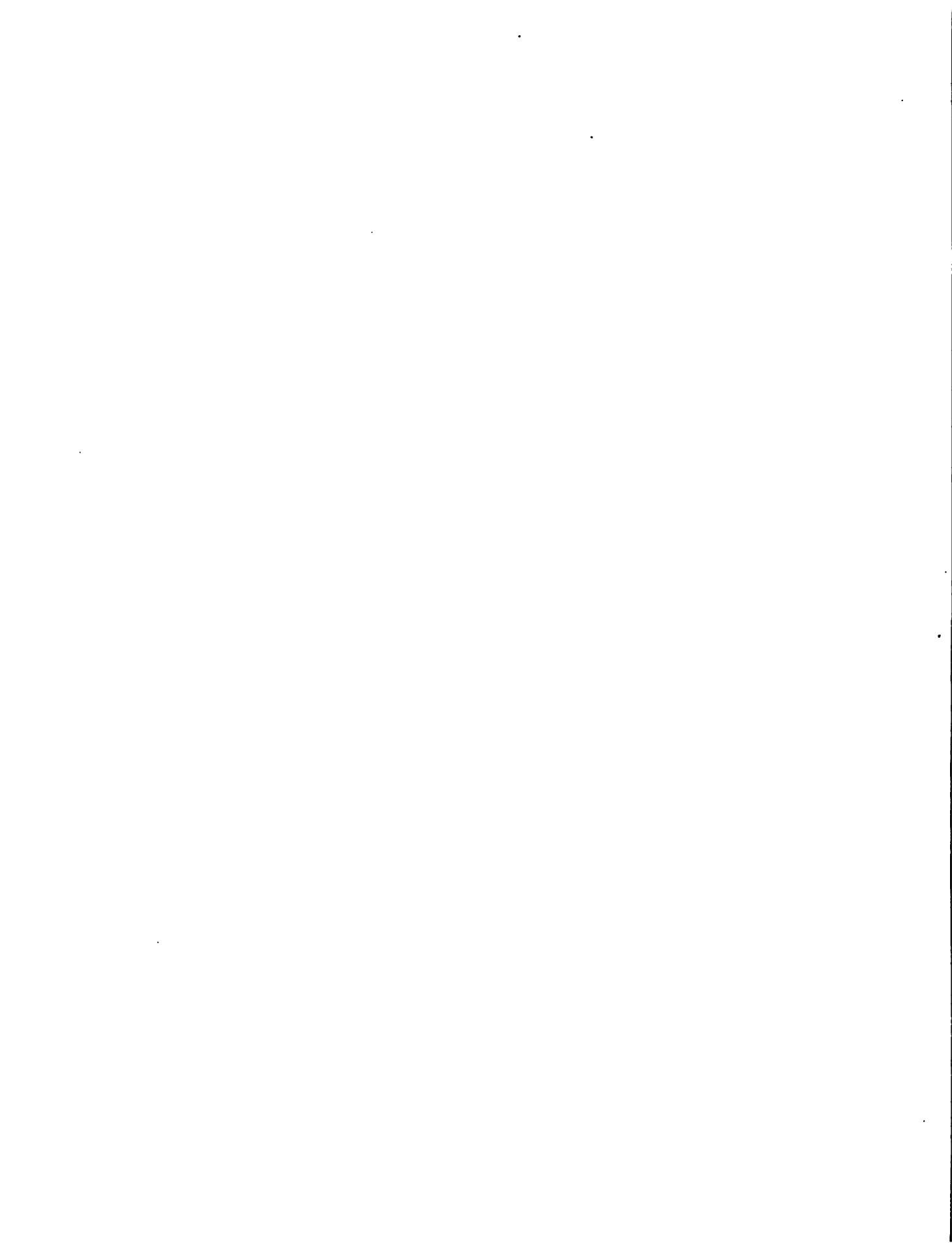
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Hon^{ble} Simon Butler

198
January
1971





T H E
GREEK THEATRE
O F
FATHER BRUMOY.

TRANSLATED

By Mrs. CHARLOTTE LENNOX.

I N T H R E E V O L U M E S.

V O L . II.



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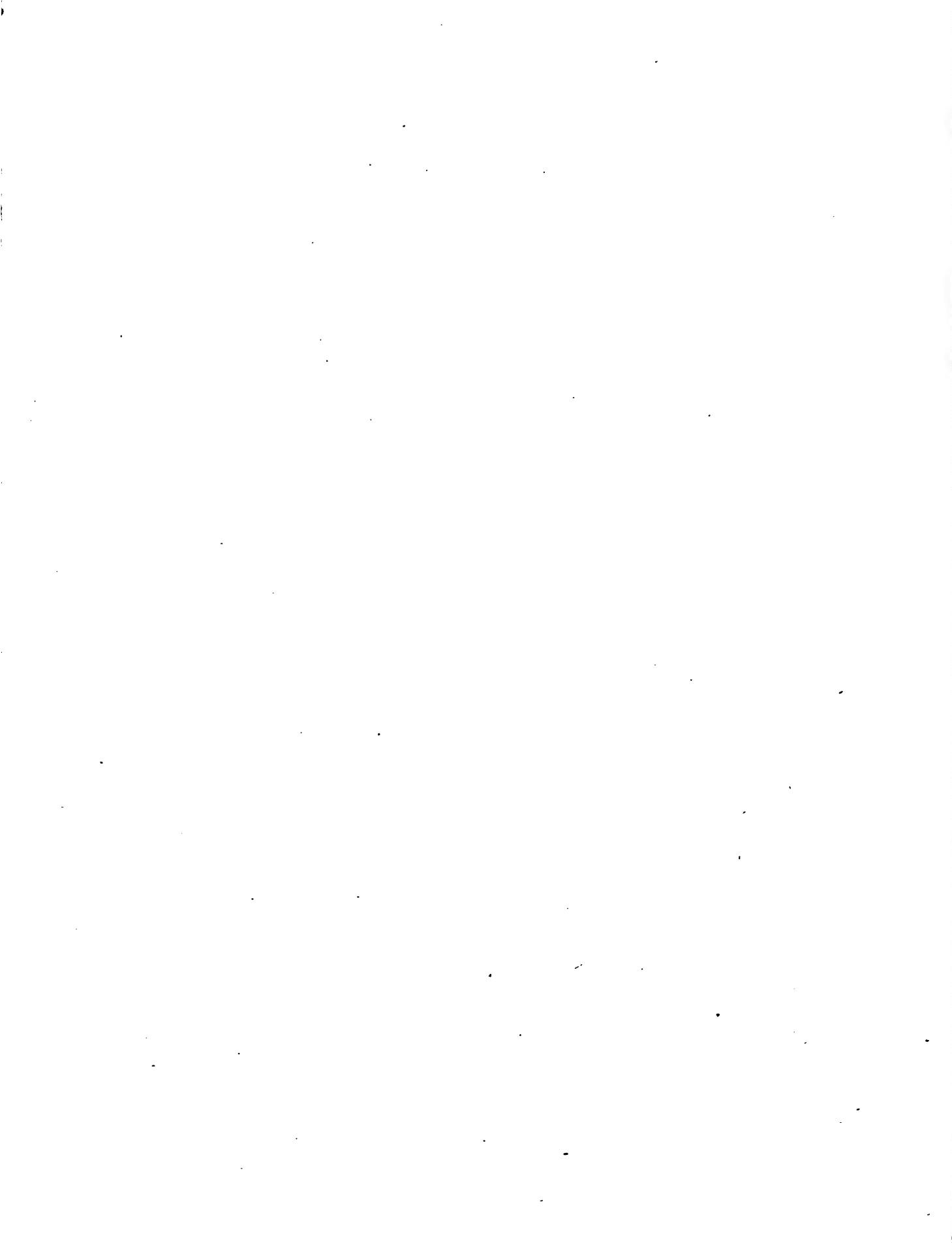
IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS.

A

TRAGEDY WRITTEN BY EURIPIDES.

VOL. II.

B



The S U B J E C T.

THE tragedy is a continuation of the Iphigenia in Aulis; and, in order to supply the incidents on which it is founded, the author was obliged to follow pretty closely the fable of the former tragedy. It is there supposed, that a hind was substituted in the place of Iphigenia at the altar; and that she herself was carried up to heaven. But the poet in this piece, shews her in Tauris * in Scythia, whither she was transported by Diana to be her priestess. The Greeks were ignorant of her fate, and Orestes believed she died by the hand of Calchas. That young prince being tormented by the furies for having killed Clytemnestra his mother, goes to Tauris by the command of Apollo, to bring away the statue of Diana, and to place it in Attica. He is taken prisoner immediately after his arrival in Tauris, and destined to be sacrificed on the altar of Diana, according to the barbarous custom of the place. In the instant when the priestess is preparing to sacrifice him, he discovers her to be his sister, which produces all those affecting situations, and those great events with which this tragedy abounds.

* Tauris, a country or peninsula of sea, and the Propontis. The Euxine is now Thrace, which juts out between the Euxine called the black sea.

P E R S O N S O F T H E D R A M A.

IPHIGENIA.

ORESTES.

PYLADES.

The CHORUS, composed of Iphigenia's women.

A SHEPHERD.

THOAS, king of Tauris.

A MESSENGER, one of the king's attendants.

MINERVA.

The SCENE is in the Vestibule of the Temple of Diana.

I P H I G E N I A

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS:

A

TRAGEDY WRITTEN BY EURIPIDES.

A C T the F I R S T.

S C E N E the F I R S T.

IPHIGENIA alone.

IPHIGENIA.

AH, wretched Iphigenia, must thy misfortunes be ever present to thy remembrance! Alas, how is it possible I should forget that fatal day, when I arrived in Aulis? that celebrated port, where the Euripus swelled by the raging winds, whirls round the giddy vessels, and threatens each moment to bury them in the vast abyss. There my father, my relentless father, offered me a victim to Diana. The hero, determined to revenge the wrongs his brother Menelaus had suffered, to efface the infamy of Helena, and to crown the Greeks with the conquest of Ilion, assembled his numerous fleet, a thousand ships, owned his command; but unfavourable winds opposed his departure, and delayed the glory of Greece. He consults the sacred fire; he questions Calchas. "King of the Greeks," replies the priest, know that these ships shall be detained in this port, till thy daughter Iphigenia is offered a victim to Diana*. Remember your former vow, by which you obliged yourself to sacrifice upon the altar of the

* Diana is in the text called θεά της γένεσιος ήταν, birth, and in an allegorical sense is taken *Dea Lucifer*; because she presided over child- for the moon.

" goddess, the most beautiful production of the year. The year
 " was distinguished by the birth of Iphigenia. It is your daugh-
 " ter, then, whom you must sacrifice." Inhuman priest; he gave
 me the superiority in beauty, to give me death. Thus authorized
 by an oracle, the crafty Ulysses snatched me from the arms of my
 mother : I was conducted to Aulis, under pretence of being mar-
 ried to Achilles ; but scarce am I arrived, when I am laid upon the
 funeral pile, the fatal sword is pointed at my breast, and Calchas
 strikes the victim. But Diana preserved my forfeit life ; the goddess
 substituted a hind in my place, and transported me through the air
 to Tauris. Here I found a barbarous people, governed by a bar-
 barous monarch. Thoas his name* ; a name expressive of his
 swiftness, which may be compared to the flight of birds. Here
 my employment is to superintend the sacrifices ; a sacred office,
 which, alas, I ought to be contented with ; my respect for the
 goddess forbids me to complain. For here the slave of a custom,
 as antient as it is cruel, I, (ah, how can I speak it !) I sacrifice
 all those Greeks whose unhappy fortune brings them to this land.
 It is I who perform the first rites, and initiate the wretched vic-
 tims. Such is my sad office : but other hands give them the fatal
 stroke, and sprinkle with their blood the palace of the dread goddess.
 But oh, these are not my only miseries ! Hear me, ye echoes† ;
 for to you will I relate the dream that terrified me last night, and
 which still dwells upon my troubled fancy. I dreamed I was far
 from these dismal regions, and returned to Argos, my native
 country. Methought I lay sleeping in my own apartment, sur-
 rounded by my women, when suddenly a violent motion shook
 the earth. I rose, I fled; and instantly the vaulted roofs fell in, the
 walls all tumbled down, and the whole palace was overthrown :
 one pillar only of our ancient house remained : it had human hair,
 methought, and a human voice. I drew near it, and, full of the
 idea of my sad employment, I wept, while I washed this dear
 pillar, as a victim destined for the sacrifice. Ah ! 'tis too plain,
 Orestes, my dearest brother, is no more ! This is the purport of my
 dream. He was the pillar and support of my family. I have
 sprinkled him with the sacred water : needs there more. Alas !
 I have no other friend to whom I can apply this fatal dream.

* θεός signifies swift in the race, a great excellence among the ancient Greeks.

† In Greek, the air.

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S. 7

Strophius * I know ; but he had no son when I was led to death. Let me then pay, at least, the last sad honours to a brother, whom I shall never, never behold again. Where are my women, those young Grecians whom Thoas gave me ? they shall assist the melancholy ceremony : but why do they not appear yet in the temple ? what is it detains them ?

[She goes out to look for them.]

S C E N E the S E C O N D.

O R E S T E S, P Y L A D E S.

O R E S T E S.

Look round my friend, observe whether any person is near us.

P Y L A D E S.

My eyes have already examined well the place : no one is here ; all is silence and solitude.

O R E S T E S.

Is not this, my dear Pylades, the temple of Diana, near which we landed ?

P Y L A D E S.

It is : you should know it as well as I.

O R E S T E S.

Here, then, is that fatal altar, which streams continually with Grecian blood.

P Y L A D E S.

The chapitre † of the altar is red.

O R E S T E S.

Behold these spoils, which are hung round the arch of the altar.

P Y L A D E S.

‡ These are the miserable remains of Grecian victims.

O R E S T E S.

* Strophius was king of Phocis, and father of Pylades. This is introduced with great judgment, to prepare the audience for the arrival of Pylades.

† The original word signifies hair; but as a word very like it has been applied to a pillar, it probably means a circular ornament of the altar.

‡ *τα ἀρπίναια.* The word here signifies properly the top of a heap, as the part first taken of any other thing. Here it is the hair, or rather the heads of human victims. The Tauro-Scythians, as Herodotus relates, used to sacrifice all strangers who were shipwrecked on their coast, after which they threw their bodies into the sea, and hung

ORESTES.

Once more, my Pylades, let us examine whether any one is here. Oh Phœbus, into what new snares will thy second oracle lead me? I come recent from a mother's blood, shed to revenge a murdered father; and, in my turn, am abandoned to the vengeance of the Furies, banished from my country, a wretched wandering fugitive! Into what lands have I not carried my misfortunes? Wearyed at length with such accumulated woes, I present myself before thy altar. I beg to know, when this madness, and these wanderings, will have an end. Thou answerest, that I must go to Tauris to the temple of Diana, thy sister, and by artifice, or some happy chance, take from thence the statue which fell from heaven, as is said, and, midst innumerable dangers, carry it to Attica, and then I shall enjoy the quiet which flies me now. Well, my voyage is finished, behold me, in obedience to thy orders here, in an unknown country, where they are ignorant of the sacred laws of hospitality. But say, my dearest Pylades, since thou art resolved to share my dangers, what shall we do now? Thou seest the height of these walls; how shall we scale this temple? * How shall we break through its brazen gates? We are not accustomed to exploits like these, and if we are discovered, inevitable death awaits us. Let us, then, wisely forego our rash design; let us return to our ships, and fly this cursed land.

PYLADES.

Why do you talk of returning? Orestes and his friend have never yet shunned necessary danger, and must not now. The oracle of Apollo shall be obeyed. Let us for the present go farther from this temple, and conceal ourselves in one of those caverns washed by the sea. There we will wait for the approach of Night, and, veiled in her friendly shades, make happier efforts to carry off this statue. You see those columns; there it is that you must descend; every thing is easy to brave men; none but cowards suffer themselves to be repulsed.

hung up their heads upon a cross, or to the roofs of their houses; and then they considered them as tutelar angels. They treated their prisoners taken in battle in the same manner. The savages of Canada have something like this barbarous and superstitious custom.

* The Abbe Sallier, by changing one letter, reads, *How shall we conceal ourselves?* See vol. v. of the *hist. of the academy of inscriptions.*

ORESTES.

ORESTE S.

I approve your scheme, my Pylades. We have not indeed undertaken this long and painful voyage to return with disappointment and disgrace. Come, let us seek for some cave to hide us from the day ; if the Oracle be not accomplished, ours will be the fault, and not the God's. Let us prepare to execute his will. What enterprise can seem too dangerous for youthful courage to attempt?

S C E N E the T H I R D.

Which serves for the Interlude.

IPHIGENIA, and the CHORUS.

IPHIGENIA.

Ye natives of the Euxine sea, and the two * isles which deceive the eyes of mariners, listen with attention to my words. Oh daughter of Latona, Goddess of woods and mountains ; thou who presidest over childbirth, great Diana, for thee I have left the walls of Greece, my celebrated country ; for thee I have abandoned her delightful groves, and my paternal house. Behold me devoted to the service of thy altar, the holy priestess of a most holy Goddess, I bring a heart pure and uncorrupted into thy awful courts, and sacred temple.

CHORUS.

Oh daughter of that king who led the innumerable armies of the Atrides against Troy ! behold us here obedient to thy orders. Say, princess, what new misfortune dost thou weep ? Why hast thou brought us to the temple ?

IPHIGENIA.

Alas, my dear companions ! in your presence I may freely indulge my grief, and abandon myself to groans and lamentations. These funeral songs suit my sad fortune. Oh wretched Iphigenia ! the miseries of thy unhappy family fall with redoubled force on thee. Alas ! I weep the death of my loved brother ! Oh, this night, this cruel night ! with what a black presage has it alarmed me !

* These two islands, called the Cyanées, are two rocks, which at a distance seem to join, from whence the Greeks gave them the name of *Symplegades*, and the Latins that of *Concurrentiajaxa*. They are upon the Euxine sea ; one in Europe, the other in Asia.

I am lost, undone ; my whole race has perished. Oh Fate ! thou hast deprived me of a brother, the only remaining branch of my family ; he is descended to the shades. It is for him that I prepare this funeral pomp, and this vase destined for the libations. This is to pour the mingled stream of honey, wine, and the blood of victims. Let us appease the manes of my brother. Give me the golden vase. Oh son of Agamemnon, dearest brother ! who art now an inhabitant of the gloomy regions of the dead, accept of this libation ; come, loved shade, come, and receive these gifts. Far from thy country, and my own, where I was supposed to have been buried, and transformed into a hind after my fatal sacrifice, I cannot spread upon thy tomb my offered hair, nor bathe it with a sister's tears.

C H O R U S.

Oh princess ! let us in our songs imitate thy funeral accents : let us answer them in barbarous strains, and in this sad ceremony employ a plaintive muse, such as Pluto inspires, and which never knew * the song of joy.

I P H I G E N I A.

Unfortunate house of the Atrides ! Oh race of Agamemnon ! the ornament and support of thy sceptre is vanished, for ever vanished ! Which of the happy Argives now fills thy throne ? Oh heaven, what a succession of miseries in our fatal house ! + The frighted sun starts back ; he turns his coursers, he veils his eyes. The fatal adventure of the golden fleece preceded this +. Ah, the black story presents nothing but horrors upon horrors, murders upon murders. The guilty shades of our ancestors have sent from hell the Fury which pursues their miserable descendants. Yes, wretched Iphigenia, a malignant genius persecutes thee. Alas, he has never quitted thee from the moment of thy birth. The Fates decreed for me a life as miserable as the marriage of Clytemnestra. I was the first fruits of that unhappy marriage : I became the object of all their cares ; but the daughter of Leda gave me birth, only to be a victim sacrificed for the Greeks, and sacri-

* Pean.

+ Iphigenia slightly touches upon the crime committed by Atreus, who made his brother Thyestes eat his own son, at which the sun started back with horror.

‡ This is the adventure which is mention-

ed in the Coëphores of Eschylus. Thyestes robbed his brother Atreus of the golden fleece, upon which the fate of his kingdom depended. Atreus in revenge murdered his son, and gave him his limbs to eat.

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS. II

ficed by a father. Ah the barbarians ! they conducted me to Aulis, in a chariot adorned like a bride : a miserable bride ! They destined me for the son of a Goddess, and I was delivered up to death. I am now an inhabitant of this savage land. Detested dwelling ! here I remain, without a husband, children, country, or friends. I am no longer employed in singing the praises of Juno, the Goddess of Argos ; nor in tracing on the glowing carpets with Minerva's art, the figures of the Titans, vanquished by her. Far different now my sad employment ; the priestess of Diana, I sprinkle her altar and the cruel Ate * with the blood of miserable wretches. Their tears, their cries, their groans, cannot save them from the fate that waits them. Yet oh, as if these bloody spectacles were not sufficient to make me wretched, I have a brother's death to mourn ; a brother whom I left in a tender age, like a fair opening flower, in the arms and bosom of his mother ! a brother, born to sway the sceptre of Argos, and to enjoy a happier destiny.

A C T the S E C O N D.

S C E N E the F I R S T.

IPHIGENIA, the CHORUS, a SHEPHERD.

The C H O R U S to I P H I G E N I A.

See that shepherd, princess, who advances hastily from the seaside ; doubtless he brings you news.

S H E P H E R D.

Ah princess ! ah daughter of Agamemnon ! prepare your heart for the strange things I have to tell you.

I P H I G E N I A.

Alas ! what are thy fatal tidings ?

S H E P H E R D.

Two young men have privately left their ship, and landed on the shore of the Cyanées. They will be welcome victims to the

* A malignant Goddess, who troubled prayers, who, as well as this Goddess, the minds of mortals, so that they might were the daughters of Jupiter, prevented or precipitate themselves into misfortunes. suspended the effects of her malice.

The poets feign, that the Liris, or

Goddefs. It is your part to give orders for the bathes, the initiations, and all the preparations for the sacrifice.

I P H I G E N I A.

Where do these strangers come from? What is their country?

S H E P H E R D.

They are Greeks. This is all I know.

I P H I G E N I A.

Hast thou not heard their names?

S H E P H E R D.

One of them is called the other Pylades.

I P H I G E N I A.

And what is the name of the other?

S H E P H E R D.

I know not; none of us heard him named.

I P H I G E N I A.

How were they perceived and taken by the shepherds?

S H E P H E R D.

We took them on the shore, near a cave of this inaccessible sea-

I P H I G E N I A.

What induced the shepherds to go thither?

S H E P H E R D.

We went to wash our flocks.

I P H I G E N I A.

Again I ask you, shepherd, how were these strangers taken? This is what I would know. Alas! it is long since any Greeks have landed on this fatal coast; their blood has ceased to stream upon this altar.

[*Afide.*]

S H E P H E R D.

My companions and I led our flocks to that part of the sea which separates the Cyanées; a steep rock is there, which, by the continual dashing of the waves, is broke in several pieces: and serves for a retreat to those who fish for the precious shells which produce the purple dye. In a hollow of this rock, one of our companions perceived two young men. Seized with astonishment and awe, he cautiously withdrew, and joining us again, Look friends,

said.

said he, through the clifts of the rock, there two Divinities have retired. Another shepherd, more religious, raised his hands and eyes to these supposed Divinities, and respectfully adoring them, Divine Palemon *, cried he, son of Leucothoe, protector of frail vessels, be favourable to us : then addressing himself to both, Whether you are the twin sons of Leda †, said he, or whether Nereus ‡, the father of fifty Goddeses, has given you birth, oh, hear us Gods! Here he was interrupted by another shepherd, whose impiety had made him fierce and vain : he laughed in scorn, and confidently asserted, that these two youths were strangers, whom the fear of our customs had obliged to conceal themselves in this cave. I confess, princess, that most of us thought he was in the right, and we agreed to seize upon these victims destined to Diana. Mean time, one of the two Greeks came out of the cave, and ascended the top of the rock. There he stopped. His head turned swiftly from side to side ; his hands trembled, his looks were wild, and he appeared to us to be possessed with a kind of frenzy. He hollowed like a huntsman, Pylades seest thou this ? Look there. Look upon that other : it is an infernal Fury. Seest thou how armed with serpents, she flies towards me : she seeks my life. What other Eumenide is this ? All her form, even her garments, breathe flames and blood. She cuts the air with her enormous wings. Oh Heaven ! She holds my mother in her arms. She comes to sink me. She pursues me. Whither, oh, whither shall I fly ? While thus he raved, you might have seen his colour and his gestures change every moment. Sometimes he bellowed like a bull : sometimes his cries resembled the barking of a dog ||. He imitated at length all those dreadful sounds which are attributed to the Eumenides. Terror and amazement seized us ; and as if we expected instant death, we bent our trembling bodies to the ground, and kept an aweful silence. Immediately the madman drew his sword, and rushed like a lyon amidst our flocks. He pierced their bowels, and dealt about his blows with a remorseless hand, supposing he should thus appease the Furies. The sea was tinged with blood. The shepherds, recovered from their terror ; and, seeing this havock among their flocks, took arms ; but apprehensive that they should not be able

* Or Melicerte, a sea-god.

† Castor and Pollux.

‡ Nereus the son of Thetis, and the father of fifty Neriads.

|| The Furies, who represented remorse, were also called dogs.

to resist the valour of these young strangers, they blew their horns to summon the inhabitants to their assistance. In a moment vast multitudes assembled. Mean time, the stranger seemed ready to faint ; the excess of his fury abated, his lips were covered with foam, and he sunk upon the ground : his fall gave us new courage, each was now eager to signalize his valour, each aimed a stroke at him, the stones fell thick about him; but the other stranger, without being dismayed, wiped off the foam which issued from the lips of his friend ; he covered him with his garments, observed, and warded off the blows, to guard him who was the only object of his tender cares. The youth recovered, he rose, and, at the sight of such a crowd of enemies, he sent forth hideous bellowings: we continued to charge them on every side, without giving them the least respite. Then it was that we heard a terrible voice utter these words : My dearest Pylades, let us die ; but that we may fall like heroes, take thy sword, and follow me. As soon as we beheld the dreadful steel, glittering in the hands of the two warriors, the forests were filled with the flying shepherds ; but while some fled before the conquerors, others followed them, and rained a shower of stones upon them. When they gave back, they spared them ; but what appears scarce credible, although so many armed men united their efforts to seize these unhappy victims, yet with the utmost difficulty we succeeded, and less by force than artifice. We surrounded them at length, and forced them to drop their swords*. Their strength being quite exhausted, their knees sunk under them. They fell ; we seized them, and led them to the king. He looked upon them, and sent them to instant death. Oh prince ! thou oughtest to wish that fortune may send thee many such victims. Soon would their blood revenge thee on the cruelty of the Greeks, and their inhuman sacrifice at Aulis.

C H O R U S.

What wonders hast thou related, Shepherd, of this unknown Grecian ! Unhappy was it for him that he landed on these shores, so fatal to all strangers !

I P H I G E N I A.

Shepherd, it is enough ; conduct the prisoners hither ; I will take care of all the rest.

* In the Greek, *By throwing stones upon them.*

SCENE

SCENE the SECOND.

IPHIGENIA, and the CHORUS.

IPHIGENIA.

And now, what sayst thou, unhappy Iphigenia? Formerly thou didst lament the unhappy Greeks who fell into thy hands, thy tears flowed for their fate, and now thou art calm, unmoved! Oh miserable victims! whoever you are, charge my insensibility to that cruel dream, which, to my tortured fancy, painted Orestes dead. Yet you will find me cruel. For oh! my dear companions, my heart is steeled, the happiness of others wounds the afflicted; and we wish they should be wretched, only because we are so. Oh Jupiter, thou who art master of the winds, send Menelaus and Helen to these fatal shores! Oh give to my vengeance these authors of my misery. Here shall they find another Aulis. Ah, the inhuman wretches, they slaughtered me like a fearful heifer; I was the victim, a father was the priest. Can I forget these horrors? Alas! they will dwell for ever in my memory. * How often did I lay my trembling hands upon my father's awful face? How often did I cling to his knees, which I held in my embraces? Oh, my father, did I say, to what a horrid marriage have you doomed me! a poor deceived, unhappy mother triumphs. The mistaken Argives express their joy in songs; they invoke the God of marriage; the palace resounds with the sprightly flute; mean time I perish by your hands, my father. This boasted Achilles was Pluto then, and not the son of Peleus; to Pluto I was promised. Ah the cruel artifice! To bring me on a triumphant chariot to this bloody marriage. Fruitless intreaties, I must obey. In vain did I through my veil cast fearful glances on him. I took this brother whom I now lament; (ah sad remembrance! he is no more) I took him in my arms, the wife of Achilles, the sister of Orestes, carried modesty so far, as to repel the tender endearments of an infant who was her brother. I delayed these soft embraces till my return. Ah vain, vain hope! My dear Orestes, if it be true, that thou art really dead, oh speak, tell me who murdered thee †? Was it

* A manner of supplicating mentioned in the holy scriptures.

† I translate this passage thus, by placing a point of interrogation in the text, without

which it appears to me to have neither connection nor sense; the commentators have said nothing concerning it, which makes it no less perplexing.

a father's cruelty? Did he sacrifice thee like me to Diana? Shocking contradiction! This goddess banishes from her altars the profane, whose impure hands are polluted with murder. Why say I murder? She indures not those who have only touched a dead body, or received an infant newly born: and shall I believe that she beholds with pleasure her altar streaming with the blood of human victims? Ah no! not from the bosom of Latona * didst thou imbibe this cruelty. It is not credible that the horrid feast of Tantalus † could please the Gods. ‡ The savage inhabitants of this land, because they delight in carnage, have attributed to the Divinity their own barbarous inclinations. The Gods are merciful and just; never can I persuade myself that they will authorize a crime.



S E C O N D I N T E R L U D E.

C H O R U S.

SOPHIE L. Tell me, ye Cyanées, ye rocks which join the seas that formerly the frantic || Io crossed, when she passed from Europe into Asia; tell me who these strangers are, who, like her, have dared to traverse the Euxine sea? Why have they left the Eurotas crowned with rushes, and the sacred banks of Dirce, to visit this inhospitable shore, where a priestess dies the altar and pillars of the temple with human blood?

ANTISTROPHE L. Was it the desire of riches that constrained you to dare the fury of the waves in a frail vessel. Riches have their charms, their fatal charms for mortals. Oh avarice, insatiate passion! thou forcest men to wander from sea to sea, from city to city, to load their shoulders

* In the Greek it is, *the wife of Jupiter.*

† Tantalus king of Phrygia often had the Gods for his guests. One day, for want of other provision, he killed his son, and served him up to them in a feast. Ceres eat a shoulder of the child, the Gods restored him to life, and supplied the shoulder that had been eaten with an ivory one; therefore Virgil, in his Georg. B. iii. v. 7. calls him *Humeroque Pelops insignis eburno.* Tantalus retired into Peloponnesus, after stealing away Ganymede, the son of a king of Troy.

‡ There is a passage which shews that the wiser set of Pagans distinguished their theology from the fable which deified the crimes and the passions of men.

|| Io, the daughter of Inachus, was beloved by Jupiter, who, to preserve her from the rage of Juno, transformed her into a heifer; but the Goddess struck her rival with madness; so that after having wandered a long time, she at length went into Asia.

with

with a useless weight. Extravagant in some, this passion becomes madness, in others moderate, they call it prudence.

How have these two strangers been able to pass between those Stromes II. islands, which seem to join? How have they escaped the rocks of Phineus *, which watch incessantly for the wreck of mariners? By what good fortune have they traversed the vast plains of Amaphitrite, where the choir of Nereids animate with songs the winds which fly around their vessels, and swell the sails? Zephyrus and the southern breeze have favoured their course to the † island famous for the exercises of Achilles.

Oh, that by some happy chance ‡ Helen may leave Troy, and ANTISTRO.
PHE II. land upon these shores, that Iphigenia's wishes may be granted! Oh, that Leda's daughter, with hair dishevelled and bleeding bosom, may expire under the hands of our princes, and by her death atone for all the miseries she has caused her. What welcome news would this be to the Greeks, if haply any of them should come to free us from our bondage! What joy, what transport! to find ourselves as in a § dream in the dear bosom of our country, and to partake those songs of gladness and of triumph.



A C T the T H I R D.

S C E N E the F I R S T.

IPHIGENIA, the CHORUS, the two Greeks in chains.

IPHIGENIA.

BEHOLD they bring the victims loaded with chains. Be silent, my dear companions. They are indeed the two Greeks destined for

* Phineus, the uncle and the lover of Andromeda. He left to Perseus the care of delivering her from the sea-monster, and afterwards attempted to carry her away, Perseus changed him into a rock.

+ The original adds, *fruitful in birds*. Achilles exercised himself in running in this island, called from thence Achillea, or Leuca, or the race of Achilles, over against the Chersonesus Taurica. It was still called the Isle of the Heroes; because it was supposed that the manes of those celebrated

warriors, who fell at the siege of Troy, retired thither.

¶ The Grecian women, who composed the Chorus, were ignorant, as well as Iphigenia, that Helen was returned to Sparta.

|| Barnes explains this passage two different ways. *Why cannot we, as in Iphigenia's dream, seem to be returned into our own country?* Or, *Why can we not, tho' but in a dream, be transported into our own country?* The sense I have chosen appears to me to be the most natural.

the sacrifice. They are leading them to the temple; the shepherd has not deceived us.

C H O R U S.

Oh princess, since to thee this savage people have confided the care of initiating the victims, receive these which are now brought to thee. Necessity requires thee to submit to a custom, which, however impious and execrable it appears to the Greeks, is nevertheless venerated here.

I P H I G E N I A.

Well, let us then begin our office; my first cares are due to the sacred rites of Diana. Unbind these strangers*. They are consecrated to the Goddess. It is no longer lawful to keep them in chains. † Go to the temple, and see that the accustomed preparations are made (*to her women*). But you unhappy strangers, tell me, who are your wretched parents? Ah, how miserable your sister, if you have one! What brothers will she lose! Alas! you are ignorant of the fate to which you are doomed; for who knows the will of Heaven? Our destiny is concealed from us. It is a mystery we cannot penetrate. Say, then, strangers, from whence do you come? What seas have you traversed to reach this coast? Far from your native country, alas, long, long will your absence be! you have left it, never more to return.

O R E S T E S.

Why dost thou take so much interest in our misfortunes? Oh, woman, whoever thou art, why dost thou lament our fate? Mean'st thou to soften us to unworthy fears? Can the dread of a near and inevitable death be subdued by fruitless tears? Why should'st thou weep the destiny of those whom it is not in thy power to save? This is to increase their misery; since we must die, suffer our fortune to take its course. Cease to pity us. We know the customs of this country, and the doom that waits us here.

I P H I G E N I A.

Which of you is named Pylades? This is what I would first know.

* The criminals were unbound when their sentence was pronounced, that they might have the melancholy satisfaction of dying free..

† Here there seems to be a difficulty: for if Iphigenia commands her women to go to the temple, the Chorus would not be present during this scene; and yet it appears by

what follows, that the Chorus were witnesses to part, at least, of Iphigenia's conversation with the two Greeks. It is natural to imagine, that some of these women went to execute the orders of the priestess, while the rest continued upon the stage; or that Iphigenia gave her commands to the other servants of the temple.

O R E S T E S.

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S.

19

O R E S T E S.

This is Pylades, (*pointing to his friend*). But why dost thou ask?

I P H I G E N I A.

In which of the Grecian cities was he born?

O R E S T E S.

Lady, again I beg thee tell me why this curiosity? Of what use is it to thee to know?

I P H I G E N I A.

Did the same mother give you birth?

O R E S T E S.

By friendship, not blood, are we brothers.

I P H I G E N I A, [*to Orestes*].

But what is thy name?

O R E S T E S.

I am miserable: this is the name which suits me best.

I P H I G E N I A.

It is an effect of thy ill fate: but this is not what I ask.

O R E S T E S.

Suffer us, Lady, to die unknown, and we shall die less wretched.

I P H I G E N I A,

Oh generous stranger! from whom hast thou imbibed these noble sentiments?

O R E S T E S.

* Thou may'st take my life; I yield it. But leave me the secret of my name: it is of no consequence to thee to know it.

I P H I G E N I A.

Thou wil'nt not, sure, refuse to tell me the name at least of the city where thou wer't born.

O R E S T E S.

Of what use will it be to name the place of my birth, when my last moment is near?

* In the text: *You are to sacrifice my body*, body and name, which cannot be expressed and not my name. In the Greek there is a in another language. relation between the words, which signify

20 I PHIGENIA IN TAURIS.

I PHIGENIA.

What hinders thee from granting me this favour?

O R E S T E S.

* Well, lady, since thou wilt know, the kingdom of Argos is my country?

I PHIGENIA.

Oh Gods! Dost thou speak truly?

O R E S T E S.

Yes, and Mycene gave me birth. Oh city once so fortunate!

I PHIGENIA.

Why did'st thou leave thy country? Wer'st thou banished?

O R E S T E S.

My banishment was partly voluntary, and partly forced.

I PHIGENIA.

Stranger, proceed, and inform me of all that I would know.

O R E S T E S.

I will obey thee, lady, in few words, and in such a manner as befits my fortune.

I PHIGENIA.

Thou little imagin'st, that thy arrival from Argos here is of the utmost consequence to me.

O R E S T E S..

Thou may'st rejoice in it: But do not require the same sentiments of me.

I PHIGENIA.

Thou hast doubtless heard of Troy; that city so celebrated throughout the world,

O R E S T E S..

Would to the Gods that I had never known it! That it was less than a dream to me!

* Orestes in this verse says, that Argos is name of the capital and the kingdom of his country, and a moment afterwards Agamemnon; as for Mycene, it was there that he was born.

I PHIGENIA.

I P H I G E N I A.

If report is to be believed, that superb city is overthrown by the
Grecian arms.

O R E S T E S.

Report has not deceived thee, Lady.

I P H I G E N I A.

Is Helen returned with Menelaus?

O R E S T E S.

Ah! how fatal has her return been to some who belong to me*!

I P H I G E N I A *afide.*

She has been the cause of my misfortunes too. Where is that
prince? then?

O R E S T E S.

At Sparta with her husband.

I P H I G E N I A.

Oh Helen! Oh execrable name to all Greece---(*afide*) and me.

O R E S T E S.

To me, indeed, her name is execrable. Too many miseries has
her fatal marriage brought upon me.

I P H I G E N I A.

Is it true, then, that the Greeks are returned from Troy, as
fame has published?

O R E S T E S.

I beseech thee tell me why all these questions? This so particu-
lar inquiry?

I P H I G E N I A.

I have my reasons for procuring this information from thee be-
fore thy death.

O R E S T E S.

Continue, then, to question me since thou takest pleasure in it. I
am ready to satisfy thee.

I P H I G E N I A.

Is the prophet Calchas returned from Troy?

* Orestes speaks here obscurely of him-
self; he dares not make himself known on
account of the parricide he had committed.

Neither does Iphigenia discover who he is.
This concealment renders the tragedy ex-
tremely interesting.

O R E S T E S.

The report of his death is spread among the Argives.

I P H I G E N I A.

Oh equitable Goddess! And the son of Laertes*, lives he still?

O R E S T E S.

He lives: at least it is believed so, but he is not yet returned to Ithaca.

I P H I G E N I A.

Oh may he perish, and never more behold his native country!

O R E S T E S.

His fate is miserable enough; wish him no worse.

I P H I G E N I A.

But does the son of Thetis, does Achilles live?

O R E S T E S.

Achilles is dead. In vain did they make preparations in Aulis for his nuptials.

I P H I G E N I A.

Ah, that was a stratagem only? They may well think so who suffered by it.

O R E S T E S.

But what am I to think, lady, of a person who seems so knowing in the affairs of Greece?

I P H I G E N I A.

Know then, I am a Grecian—I was carried away from my country at an early age.

O R E S T E S.

Pardon me, I am now no longer surprised at thy curiosity.

I P H I G E N I A.

What is become of that fortunate general? that—

O R E S T E S.

Whom dost thou mean, lady? For, alas! the general, I know cannot be called fortunate.

* Ulysses.

IPHIGENIA.

I P H I G E N I A.

I mean Agamemnon, the son (as it is said) of Atreus.

O R E S T E S.

I know nothing of him. In the name of the Gods, I conjure thee, ask me no questions concerning him.

I P H I G E N I A.

Ah, by those Gods, I beg thee speak and calm my griefs !

O R E S T E S.

Unhappy prince ! he is no more, and others have followed him.

I P H I G E N I A.

He is dead then ! Oh my heart !---but say, how died he ?

O R E S T E S.

What means that sigh which escaped thee, lady ? What interest hast thou in the fate of this prince ?

I P H I G E N I A.

I think of his former fortune, and lament him.

O R E S T E S.

His fate was indeed deplorable : he died by the cruel hands of his wife.

I P H I G E N I A.

Oh barbarous woman ! Oh most unhappy prince !

O R E S T E S.

Enquire no farther. I have told thee all.

I P H I G E N I A.

One word more, and I am satisfied. Is the wife of that prince alive still ?

O R E S T E S.

She is dead. Her son, her own son, murdered her.

I P H I G E N I A, (*aside*).

Oh Heaven ! what confusion in the family of Atreus ! Did this son kill her voluntarily ?

O R E S T E S.

He did. He revenged his father by her death.

I P H I G E N I A.

IPHIGENIA.

Gods ! what a crime ! but oh, what justice too !

ORESTES.

Innocent as he is, the Gods are his enemies.

IPHIGENIA.

Remains there at Mycene any other branch of this unhappy family ?

ORESTES.

Only Electra.

IPHIGENIA.

What, then, do they know nothing concerning her sister, who was sacrificed at Aulis ?

ORESTES.

Nothing, but that she is dead.

IPHIGENIA.

I pity her ; I pity her father too, who became her murderer.

ORESTES.

Severely was he punished for it. The mother revenged on him her daughter's death.

IPHIGENIA.

Is the son of the murdered king in Argos ?

ORESTES.

He lives, but where I know not. A wretched fugitive, he is in all places, and in none.

IPHIGENIA, (*aside*).

He lives ! It is enough. Away ye dreams that have deceived me. Ye are illusions all. And you, ye Genii, your boasted knowledge is as vain. Ah, it is too true, that error is the portion of the Gods, as well as of weak mortals. To prove these faithless oracles true, the son of Agamemnon must be descended to the shades.

CHORUS.

Alas ! Who will bring us likewise news of our relations, and inform us whether they are still among the living ?

IPHIGENIA.

IPHIGENIA.

Strangers, the discourse we have had together may possibly be advantageous to you. If thou [*to Orestes*] approve of what I am going to propose, I hope the event will be favourable to us both. It is to thee that I address myself. I give thee life, provided that, in return for this benefit, thou wilt go back to Argos, and bear to the few friends I have still left in that country a letter, which a captive, moved to compassion by my unhappy fate, has written in my name. A victim to the rigid laws of Diana, he knew not that my murdering hand would, in reward for this service, give him death. Alas! till now I have not met with any Greek who could return to Argos, and deliver this letter to the person in the world that is most dear to me. As for thee, young stranger, who seem'st to enter into my interests, who know'st Mycene, and those I love there, depart, and execute this commission. In reward for this service, I will save thy life: but thy friend here [*pointing to Pylades*], since our laws require it, must die for both.

ORESTES.

No, lady, no; he must not die. All but this I consent to. Alas, can I bear to see him perish! It is I that have embarked him on this sea of miseries. Impelled by a too ardent friendship, he has followed a blind pilot. Is it just, that to serve thee, I should give him up to death, and preserve my life at such a price? No; make him thy messenger to Argos, and consign me over to those who are to shed my blood. Ah, what baseness would be mine, could I resolve to procure my safety with the loss of a friend, who associated himself in my calamities! He has done this, and his life is dearer to me than my own.

IPHIGENIA.

Oh virtue, oh generosity unequalled! How illustrious must be that source from whence thou hast drawn these noble sentiments! Would to the Gods, that the only surviving branch of my family may resemble thee. For know, I have a brother, and am wretched only in my absence from him. Let thy friend return, then; since thou wilt have it so, I consent to it; take thy heroic wish, and die.

ORESTES.

By whom am I to be sacrificed? Who is to perform the barbarous office?

I P H I G E N I A.

I, who am Diana's priestess ; it is my office.

O R E S T E S.

Ah, lady, what a horrible employment ; and how unworthy of one like thee !

I P H I G E N I A.

Fatal necessity ! It must be so.

O R E S T E S.

How ! a woman plunge a poniard into the breasts of men !

I P H I G E N I A.

No : my office is to pour the lustral water upon the heads of the unhappy victims.

O R E S T E S.

But may I ask, who is the sacrificer ?

I P H I G E N I A.

Those to whom this sad task belongs are in the temple.

O R E S T E S.

* What tomb am I to have ?

I P H I G E N I A.

The sacred fire, and a cave for thy ashes.

O R E S T E S.

Oh that the last sad duties might be paid me by my sister !

I P H I G E N I A.

Fruitless wishes ! Oh stranger, whomsoever thou art, thy sister is far, far from these barbarous shores ; but since thou art a Grecian, myself will perform the duty of a sister to thee. My hands with pious care shall adorn thy tomb. I will throw funeral cakes upon thy pile, and pour into it libations of honey. For oh, assure thyself, I am not an enemy to thee. My letter

* Nothing seemed of more consequence to the ancients than funeral rites. It is not necessary to prove this by quoting a great number of passages. A man was deemed unfortunate, if he did not expire in the arms of his relations, and if he died out of his own country. Iphigenia, to console Ores-

tes on this occasion, offers to pay him herself the last duties, and to hold the place of a sister to him. It is this circumstance which enhanced the pleasure of the audience, who knew that Iphigenia was really the sister of the destined victim.

is in the temple. Guards, unbind the captives, and leave them.
 [Aside] Now then, at last, I can write to my loved brother! This unhoped-for message will inform him, at least, that I still live, and fill him with the softest joy.

SCENE the SECOND.

ORESTES, PYLADES, CHORUS.

CHORUS, *to Orestes as they go out.*

Ah how we pity thee, generous stranger, thou who art destined to see the bloody drops of lustrations sprinkled upon thee!

ORESTES.

No, no; I am not to be pitied. Receive my thanks, and my farewell.

CHORUS, *to Pylades.*

As for thou, who art to return into thy country, we congratulate thy good fortune.

PYLADES.

Oh miserable fortune, to lose what I hold most dear!

CHORUS, *going off the Stage.*

Inhuman sacrifices, how fatal are you to strangers! Which of the two must die, their friendship, we see, makes still doubtful.

SCENE the THIRD.

Which serves for the Interlude.

ORESTES, PYLADES.

ORESTES.

Tell me, my dearest Pylades, is thy heart agitated with emotions like those I feel?

PYLADES.

Explain thyself, prince.

ORESTES.

Who can this priestess of Diana be? With what eager curiosity she inquired concerning the misfortunes of Troy, the return of the Greeks, the deaths of Calchas and Achille's. Didst thou observe how

she lamented Agamemnon ; how anxiously she enquired after the destiny of his wife and children ? Depend upon it, Argos is her country. What other motive could engage her to send a letter there, or to interest herself thus in the affairs of Argos, as if they were her own ?

PYLADES.

My sentiments agree with thine. Yet the eyes of all are fixed upon the fate of princes, and no one is ignorant of their misfortunes. But, prince *, there was something else which she said---

ORESTES.

Say, what was it ? Let us mutually explain our thoughts.

PYLADES.

Ah, my Orestes ! wert thou to perish, I should be ashamed to see the light. With thee have I traversed the sea, with thee I am resolved to die. How could I shew myself in Argos †, or in Phocis ‡ ? (Thou knowest mankind) ; they would reproach me for returning without thee. They would say, I had betrayed thee, that I had deprived thee of life, and took advantage of the calamities of thy family, to seize thy crown, and reign over thy kingdoms in right of thy sister, who is my wife. Oh Gods ! what ignominy, what disgrace ! No, my Orestes, no ; I cannot, I will not survive thee. Expiring on the altar with my friend, my ashes shall be mixed with thine. Friendship, honour, all require this of me.

ORESTES.

Bemore just, my dearest Pylades ; leave me to suffer alone a punishment which is only due to me. I have fortitude enough to enable me to die once : but oh, I feel I am too weak to endure a double death. Plead not those reproaches which thou apprehendest. With much more justice would they fall on Orestes, if I could be so base as to sacrifice a friend that has sacrificed all for me. Reflect, my dearest Pylades, that to me, thus persecuted by the Gods, death is

* He means, as we shall see presently, the sentence of death, which Iphigenia had pronounced against Orestes, who solicited it. Here begins that admirable contest of friendship which Ovid mentions in the third *de Ponto*.

“ Ire jubet Pylades charum morituros Orestem ;
“ Hic negat ; inque vicem pugnat uterque mori.
“ Extitit hoc unum quod non convenerit illis ;
“ Cætera pars concors & sine lite fuit.

Pylades being determined to die, conjured his beloved Orestes to return ; Orestes refused to comply, and obstinately disputed with him that death from which he would deliver him, by his own. This was the only opposition that ever was between them ; in all things else they agreed.

† The country of Orestes.
‡ The country of Pylades.

a blessing.

a blessing. It is for thee to live, thou whose family is innocent and flourishing, while mine is guilty and unfortunate. Live, then, with *Electra, my sister: from me thou received'st her; my name shall revive in thy children, and my race will not be entirely extinct. Adieu, my dear Pylades; long may'st thou enjoy that life and that crown which I bequeath thee. The only favour which dying I implore is, that thou wilt at thy return erect a tomb for me, which may perpetuate my memory. Let my sister bathe it with her tears, and strew her hair upon it. Tell her, that I died by the hand of a priestess upon Diana's altar. I recommend my sister to thee; be faithful to my alliance, and to my family, of which thou wilt be the only support, and never abandon Electra. Adieu, thou dearest, thou best and faithfulest of friends. + Thou who from thy infancy wert bred up with me, the partner of all my innocent + amusements, what labours, what afflictions, hast thou not endured in tenderness to me! Apollo has deceived us. Perplexed by his vain predictions, we have wandered far from our native country. It is by his cruel artifice that we are now here. I resigned myself entirely to his conduct, thou knowest it: his barbarous oracles made me a parricide. --- The Gods punish me for that crime, and now I also die.

P Y L A D E S ||, *after a short pause.*

Well, Orestes, thou must be obeyed. I will take care that thou shalt have a tomb, I will never abandon Electra. Orestes, when dead, shall have a more ardent friend in Pylades than while he lived. But why do I talk of thy death, prince? We are not yet reduced to this sad extremity. I see myself indeed upon the point of becoming the most wretched of men by thy loss. Yet the Oracle foretold not this. Believe me, dear Orestes, calamities, when they have reached their utmost height, often bring forth amazing revolutions.

O R E S T E S .

Banish those hopes: the oracles of Apollo have deceived me. Behold the priestess comes out of the temple, to sacrifice her victim.

* Pylades had married Electra, as has been seen in the Electra of Sophocles.

+ Electra sent Orestes, when he was twelve years of age, to Strophius king of Phocis. He was bred up with Pylades.

† In the Greek it is, *The pleasures of the chase.*

|| Pylades pretends to comply, for fear of grieving his friend; nevertheless his resolution continues unchanged; he depends upon some happy turn, which will free them both from this perplexity.

A C T the F O U R T H.

S C E N E the F I R S T.

IPHIGENIA, ORESTES, PYLADES,
the CHORUS.

IPHIGENIA to the CHORUS.

R ETIRE my dear companions: Go into the temple, and make preparations for the sacrifice.

S C E N E the S E C O N D.

IPHIGENIA, ORESTES, PYLADES.

IPHIGENIA.

Stranger, here is the letter which I would send to Argos; but still my fears perplex me. In calamity we are humble; but, no sooner are we freed from it, than we forget the wholesome lessons it has taught us. How shall I be assured that he, to whom I confide this letter, will not neglect to perform his promise, when he beholds himself at a distance from this dangerous shore?

O R E S T E S.

What strange suspicions are these, lady! But say, what security dost thou require for the performance of thy message?

IPHIGENIA.

Swear to deliver this letter to the person I shall name.

O R E S T E S.

Wilt thou also bind thyself by an oath.

IPHIGENIA.

To do what?

O R E S T E S.

To preserve the life of Pylades, and send him hence.

IPHIGENIA.

How, unless I do this, can he deliver my letter?

O R E S T E S.

But will the tyrant grant him this favour?

IPHIGENIA.

I PHIGENIA.

I will obtain it. I will myself dismiss thy friend.

O R E S T E S.

It is sufficient. [To Pylades] And now, my friend, swear first,
and let the most sacred oath be the pledge of thy faith,

P Y L A D E S, *with a perplexed air.*

I will deliver - - -

I PHIGENIA.

Say, that thou wilt deliver this letter to my friends.

P Y L A D E S.

Lady, I will deliver it.

I PHIGENIA.

And I will dismiss thee safe from the Cyanées islands.

O R E S T E S.

Which of the Gods do'st thou attest, lady?

I PHIGENIA.

Diana, whose priestess I am.

P Y L A D E S.

And I take Jupiter, the master of the Gods, to witness, that I
will perform my promise.

I PHIGENIA.

And if thou deceiv'st me - - -

P Y L A D E S.

May I never return to my native country! And thou, lady - - -

I PHIGENIA.

May I never see Argos more.

P Y L A D E S.

But we have forgot one article.

I PHIGENIA.

Well, if it is necessary, we will repeat our oath.

P Y L A D E S.

No, lady; there is one condition thou must consent to. If my
ship

ship should be swallowed up in a tempest, and thy letters with my fortune perish in the wreck: in a word, if I am able to save only my own life, free me from this obligation.

IPHIGENIA.

I have thought of a better expedient. I will tell thee the purport of my letter, and this will supply its loss. If thou preserve it, it will convey my wishes to my friends. If the sea, when it spares thee, should destroy my letter, thou wilt be the depositary of its contents.

PYLADES.

I admire thy prudence, lady. By this expedient neither the honour of the Gods, nor my piety, will be wounded. Tell me, then, to whom am I to deliver this letter?

IPHIGENIA.

Say to Orestes, the son of Agamemnon--- (*She reads*), *She who writes to thee, is that princess who was sacrificed at Aulis, Iphigenia, who still lives, though she lived no longer to you.*

ORESTES.

Iphigenia! Oh Heaven! is it possible? She who was sacrificed upon the altar of Diana! has she returned to life? Where is she, then?

IPHIGENIA.

Thou seest her now. I am Iphigenia. Interrupt me no more. (*She continues to read*). *Ob my brother, restore me to my native country, deliver me from this inhuman land, and from the fatal honour of sacrificing to Diana all the Greeks who enter it.*

ORESTES, [*In a low voice to Pylades.*]

Oh Pylades!

IPHIGENIA *continues to read.*

Again, I conjure thee, deliver Iphigenia, or she will become the fury of thy house. Yes, Orestes---[To Pylades] I repeat this name, to fix it in thy memory.

PYLADES.

Oh Gods!

IPHIGENIA.

Why this astonishment? Why dost thou call upon the Gods?

PYLADES.

PYLADES, *recovering himself.*

It is nothing, lady; pray go on. My mind had wandered a little. Perhaps, when I presume to interrogate thee, in my turn, I may make discoveries, which to thee will appear scarce credible.

IPHIGENIA, *not reading now.*

Tell Orestes, that Diana substituted a hind in my place, which my father sacrificed, believing he plunged the poniard into my bosom, and that the goddess transported me to this land. This is the purport of my letter; and now thou knowest my secret.

PYLADES.

Oh with what delight can I disengage myself this moment from the oath by which thou hast so fortunately bound me. Yes, princess, thou shalt be instantly obeyed. [To Orestes.] Orestes, receive thy sister's letter.

ORESTES.

I do receive it: but I need not open it now. Iphigenia, thus present to my eyes, I enjoy a satisfaction far more perfect. Oh, my sister, my dearest Iphigenia! is it thee whom I embrace? Thou art silent; thou answerest not. Struck with an event so strange, and so unlooked for, I can scarce believe my eyes.—Yes, it is thee whom I behold! It is, it is Iphigenia! Oh, unheard of prodigy*! Pardon these transports of a brother's joy.

SCENE

" *The finest of all remembrances is that which is produced by the incidents themselves, and which by probable means occasion extreme surprize, as in the Oedipus of Sophocles, and the Iphigenia of Euripides; for nothing can be more probable and natural than that Oedipus should be curious to know his birth, and that Iphigenia should write a letter to Orestes, &c." Aristot. Poet. C. 17.

This philosopher distinguishes four kinds of remembrances, one by sensible marks, as the scar of Ulysses; another by arbitrary tokens; a third by reasoning; and a fourth by memory. The latter deserves a place here, on account of those two examples of it quoted by him, which has been used very happily. " It is done by memory, when an object recalls to our minds some circumstances which produce the remem-

brance, as in the Cypriades of Dicæogenes, where he who saw a picture wept, and his tears made him remember; or as in Alcinous, Ulysses, hearing a man play upon the harp, and remembering his former toils and misfortunes, could not restrain his tears; and by them he was known." See also the fifteenth chapter, where Aristotle gives great praise to the remembrance in Iphigenia.

" Whether a poet writes on a subject already known, or invents a new one, it is necessary that he should form his fable in general, before he thinks of Episodes for it, and of extending it by circumstances. Thus he will bring his whole subject in one point of view. For example; this is the subject of Iphigenia, formed in the manner I mean. A young princess is placed on the altar to be sacrificed; she disappears on

SCENE the THIRD.

To them, the CHORUS.

CHORUS.

What means this presumption, stranger? How dar'st thou touch with thy profane hands the sacred veil of a priestess?

ORESTES.

Why dost thou decline my embraces? Oh, Iphigenia, art thou not my sister? the daughter of Agamemnon, my father? Am I not thy brother? that Orestes whom thou never more expected'st to behold?

IPHIGENIA.

I, am I thy sister! Art thou my brother? Oh seek not to deceive me. My brother is in Nauplia of Argos*.

ORESTES.

Ah, unkind Iphigenia! Am I not, then, thy brother?

IPHIGENIA.

Art thou the son of Clytemnestra?

ORESTES.

I am, and a descendant of Pelops.

IPHIGENIA.

Is it possible! - - - What proof can't thou give me?

ORESTES.

The proof I will give thee, is a secret which concerns thyself.

" a fadden from the eyes of the spectators, and
" is carried into another country, where it is the
" custom to sacrifice strangers to the Goddess who
" presides over it. She is made priestess of that
" temple. Some years after the brother of that
" princess arrives at the same place. Why did
" he come there? In obedience to an oracle.
" This is out of the general and universal
" fable. What did he come there for?
" that is out of the subject. He is no sooner
" arrived, but he is taken: behold him then
" upon the point of being sacrificed. But the

" remembrance is made in that very mo-
" ment, either as Euripides has imagined,
" or according to the verisimilitude which
" Polydes has very well observed in making
" that prince say, *It is not enough for my sister*
" *to have been sacrificed, but I also must bleed*
" *upon an altar.* And this preferred him."

Aristot. Poet. Ch. 18.

† Nauplia, a city in the kingdom of Argos, so called because it was a sea-port, *Ναύπλιον ον τὸν ναυόν αποτίθεται.*

IPHIGENIA.

I P H I G E N I A.

Speak, then.

O R E S T E S.

Answer my questions first. Do'st thou know, Iphigenia*, the fatal discord between Thyestes and Atreus?

I P H I G E N I A.

Fame has informed me of it. It was occasioned by the Golden Fleece.

O R E S T E S.

Do'st thou remember a piece of embroidery wrought by thy own hands? It represents this history.

I P H I G E N I A.

Dearest stranger -- (*Afide*) Oh, my fond heart, how fain would it acknowledge a brother!

O R E S T E S.

And the Sun eclipsed.

I P H I G E N I A.

I remember it; it was wrought with my own hands.

O R E S T E S.

Did not a mother at Aulis pour the lustral water on thee -- -

I P H I G E N I A.

Ah, it is too true! Such was the fatal marriage to which they doomed me.

O R E S T E S.

Why did'st thou send thy hair to Clytemnestra?

I P H I G E N I A.

To be spread upon my tomb.

O R E S T E S.

But there remains a proof more certain. Thou know'st that celebrated spear with which Pelops killed Oenomaüs, when he won Hippodamia at Pisa. I saw it in thy apartment.

* In the text, it is Electra. But, without entering into the different reasons given for it by the commentators, it is sufficient to agree with Barnes, that this must be an

error of the copyists, who have written Ἰφιγένεια, instead of Ιφιγένια, which agrees with the measure of the verses.

IPHIGENIA.

Enough, enough, my dear Orestes. Yes, thou art Orestes. What other name can my affection give thee? Oh, thou art all that's dear to me--My only brother, my Orestes! And do I then behold thee here, so far from Argos! Oh, my brother!

ORESTES.

And am I so happy to see again a sister who was believed to be in the gloomy regions of the dead! Ah, my eyes, like thine, are filled with tears of joy.

IPHIGENIA.

I left thee, I remember it, scarce weaned from the bosom thou hadst sucked. Scarce didst thou know thy parents and thy family. Oh my brother! Oh indulgent heaven! My dear Orestes, what shall I say to thee! how express my joy, my wonder, at this blest event, this more than miracle!

ORESTES.

Thus restored to each other, never more will we be separated; nothing now shall disturb our happiness.

IPHIGENIA, [to the Chorus.]

Oh, my loved friends, you who take a tender share in all my various fortunes, behold me now entranced in this un hoped for joy. But alas! I have but too much reason to apprehend that it will escape my eager grasp like a vain phantom. Oh Argos, oh Mycene, my dearest country, what do I not owe to thee for such a brother! Thou gavest him birth; in thy bosom he was nourished. This is thy glory, and my happiness.

ORESTES.

Yes, Iphigenia, we are happy in an illustrious birth. But oh, if we reflect on the miseries our lives have been subjected to, what little reason have we to boast of that advantage!

IPHIGENIA.

What, indeed, was my misery, when my unfortunate father prepared to plunge the sacred knife into my heart?

ORESTES.

Why dost thou recal this fatal remembrance? Scarce can I believe I see thee now alive.

IPHIGENIA.

I was deprived of the glorious title of Achilles' wife, and delivered up to furious wolves. Ah, brother, tears, groans, and despair, surrounded that fatal altar!

ORESTES.

Detested ceremony!

IPHIGENIA.

How have I lamented Agamemnon's unnatural decree! Ah barbarous, ah inhuman father!

ORESTES.

What a series of calamities! And oh, Iphigenia, if forced by some black Divinity, thy slaughtering hands had taken a brother's life?

IPHIGENIA.

Oh horrid thought! Alas, my dear Orestes, I reproach myself for having passed the shocking doom --- Ah, how near wert thou the suffering it! Execrable deed! Orestes sacrificed by his sister! What horror! Alas, where will our misfortunes end! By what happy chance shall we be delivered? What expedient shall I find to save a brother from a cruel death, to prevent these altars from streaming with his blood! By what methods shall I deliver him from this inhuman land, and send him back to Argos! My dear Orestes, think of some way to escape the danger with which thou art threatened; wilt thou attempt to fly rather by land than sea? But oh, how many perils must thou dare! How many savage nations, how many frightful countries, must thou pass through --- Yet how canst thou sail between the Cyanees -- Oh Heaven, how wretched am I now! How will these obstacles be removed? What God, what mortal, what happy chance, will smooth the way to our escape, and put a period to our misfortunes?

CHORUS.

Delighted with the wonders we have heard, Orestes, we now confess, that the embraces of friends who meet thus unexpectedly are lawful. Tears and complaints are now unseasonable---The question is, how to preserve thy life, and secure thy escape, from these inhuman shores? The wise seize opportunity, and take pleasure in freeing themselves from the capricious hand of fortune.

ORESTES.

ORESTES.

Fortune herself will assist us ; unfavourable as she hath hitherto been, yet I hope all from her. Is not this Goddess more powerful than mortals ?

IPHIGENIA.

Thou hast informed me of every thing that concerns my family ; only the destiny of Electra, which I take so tender an interest in, I know not yet.

ORESTES.

Electra is happy. She is the wife of my friend whom thou beholdest here.

IPHIGENIA.

Say, who is he ? Who is his father ? What his country ?

ORESTES.

Strophius of Phocis is his father.

IPHIGENIA.

Oh Heaven ! Anaxibia the daughter of Atreus is his mother, then, and we are by blood united.

ORESTES.

Yes, we are united by blood, but by friendship much more closely.

IPHIGENIA.

He was not born when Agamemnon sacrificed me to Diana.

ORESTES.

He was not ; for Strophius was some time without having any pledge of his marriage.

IPHIGENIA. [To Pylades.]

Oh spouse of Electra, my loved sister, how dear is thy presence to me !

ORESTES.

The deliverer of Orestes. By this title he is dearer to me than that of kinsman.

IPHIGENIA.

But oh, my brother, is it possible that thou could'st arm thy cruel hands against a mother's life !

ORESTES.

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S. 39

O R E S T E S.

No more of this, my sister, I revenged a father's murder.

I P H I G E N I A.

What fury urged Clytemnestra to that execrable deed?

O R E S T E S.

Let us, if possible, forget a mother's crimes. It is not fit that thou shouldst hear the sad relation.

I P H I G E N I A.

I will enquire no more. But say, is not the sceptre of Argos in thy hands?

O R E S T E S.

Menelaus reigns in Argos, and I am an exile.

I P H I G E N I A.

How! has Agamemnon's brother ruined the remains of an unfortunate family?

O R E S T E S.

No; the dread of the Furies, which pursue me, forced me to abandon my native country.

I P H I G E N I A.

Ah, this was the frenzy, then, the said effects of which I was informed of.

O R E S T E S.

Alas! I have been often seen in that unhappy state.

I P H I G E N I A.

Ah, my brother, I understand thee. The Furies take vengeance on thee, then, for the murder of thy mother.

O R E S T E S.

Dreadful is their vengeance; their bloody stings have almost reached my heart.

I P H I G E N I A.

Why didst thou approach this unknown shore?

O R E S T E S.

I came in obedience to the Oracle of Apollo.

I P H I G E N I A.

With what design? Is it a secret which thou dar'st not reveal?

O R E S T E S.

Q·R·E·S·T·E·S·

Thou shalt know, Iphigenia: After the crime committed by Clytemnestra, a crime which I bury in silence, and my revenge, the Eumenides seized me, and banished me from my country. Apollo also obliged me to travel to Athens*, to appear before those Divinities †, whom we tremble to name. That awful tribunal ‡, to whose decree Jupiter forced the God Mars himself to submit, when he had polluted his hands with murder. When I arrived, they looked on me as an execrable wretch, an enemy to the Gods. All hearts, all doors, were shut against me. Those who still retained some respect for the sacred laws of hospitality, received me at length; but would neither admit me to their table, nor their conversation. Alone, without companion, without converse, though surrounded with crowds, I lived in solitude. To palliate this disgraceful separation, each guest used to drink wine out of his own cup ||, they had not one in common, as usual. I dissembled my grief and indignation at this affront; for I durst not complain; but my heart was torn with remorse and shame for the parricide I had committed. I have since been informed, that my misfortune gave rise to a festival at Athens, which still subsists, in honour of the cup of libation. Resolved to submit to the judgment of the Areopagus, I entered, and took a seat, as being the accused; the other was occupied by the chief of the Eumenides, my accuser. Apollo heard, and spoke in my defence. Minerva herself counted the suffrages, and I left the place absolved. The rest of the Furies, dissatisfied with the judgment of the Areopagus, would not quit me, and from that day have harrassed me with incessant wanderings. At length I returned to Delphos. I took no nourishment, but prostrated myself before the altar of Apollo, resolved to die, unless this Deity, who had been the sole cause of my misfortunes, would now become the author of my preservation. Immediately I heard a voice proceeding from the sacred Tripod §,

* In the Greek it is, *On foot.*

† The ancients avoided as much as possible naming the Furies. The word Eumenides seemed to them less terrible. There is the same difference between those two words, as between *devil* and *demon* with us.

‡ This tribunal was the Areopagus, so called, because Mars was the first who underwent there the sentence of the twelve Divinities.

|| Demophon, king of Athens, finding

that Orestes was charged with the guilt of parricide, was not willing either to reject him, or to sit with him at his table, but contrived to have him served separately; and, to palliate this affront, he ordered that each of the guests should have a cup to himself, which was contrary to custom. This was the foundation of the festival called Ἑορτὴ χύτη. The cup named χύτη was an Attic measure.

§ In Greek, *of gold.*

which

which commanded me to sail to this country, and bring away the statue that fell from heaven, to place it in Athens. Such are the orders of Apollo----But thou, my sister, must assist me to accomplish them. If I can get possession of this sacred pledge, I shall be delivered from the Furies. We will embark together in my ship, and I will convey thee to Mycene. Once more, my dear Iphigenia, I conjure thee, save thyself, save thy brother, save the remains of a deplorable family. The fate of Pelops' race is in thy hands. We are lost, unless the celestial statue is removed to Athens.

C H O R U S.

Alas ! with what misfortunes have the angry Gods overwhelmed the race of Tantalus !

I P H I G E N I A.

Before thy arrival here, my brother, I languished in ceaseless wishes to return to Argos, and to see thee once more. Still do I wish it. I would preserve a brother, I would rekindle the dying embers of an illustrious house, (for I forget my father was my murderer). No, my Orestes, thou shalt not die ; our name shall survive in thee. But say, how shall I steal away the image of the Goddess ? How shall I deceive the king ? When he finds the altar robbed of the statue, he will know that mine must be the theft. What excuse shall I form to satisfy him ? Ah, if it were possible for thy schemes to succeed, if thou could'st carry me away with the Goddess, if this glorious enterprize could be executed---But no, it cannot be ; Orestes shall see again his native country ; the wretched Iphigenia must stay and perish.--It matters not---What dangers would I not meet to save a brother ! Even death itself on that condition would be welcome. Freely will I expose my life to purchase thine, my dear Orestes. I am but a daughter, and thou art the only prop of our almost ruined house.

O R E S T E S.

'Ah, Iphigenia, the Gods forbid I should be twice a parricide. I am too guilty already, by a mother's blood---No, my sister, our destinies shall be the same ; we will either live or die together. I will convey thee back to Greece, or else Taurica shall be our common tomb. But think'st thou, Iphigenia, that, if this removal of her statue was disagreeable to the Goddess, Apollo would have commanded me to attempt it ? Would he have blest me with

this happy meeting? No, no, the propitious Deity has not deceived me. The more I think of these surprising events, the stronger are my hopes, that all will yet end happily for us.

IPHIGENIA.

But how will it be possible to carry away the statue, and escape the death which threatens us? We would effect all this, but, alas, wishes do little.

ORESTES.

Let us kill the tyrant.

IPHIGENIA.

Ah! what is it thou say'st, my brother? Would'st thou violate the sacred laws of hospitality?

ORESTES.

This must be done, Iphigenia, if we can by no other means preserve thy life and mine.

IPHIGENIA.

* I can neither approve a crime, nor blame your courage.

ORESTES, *after a little pause.*

Well, let us quit this design, then---Can you not conceal me in the temple, and---

IPHIGENIA.

And so endeavour to escape, favoured by the darkness?

ORESTES.

Night is as favourable to fraud, as light to truth.

IPHIGENIA.

But the temple is filled with guards; how shall we be able to deceive their watchful eyes?

ORESTES.

Oh Heaven! then we are lost, what can we now resolve on?

IPHIGENIA.

I have this moment thought of an expedient.

* Barnes is certainly in the right; the text ought to be read *in aīmōlūn, I cannot approve a crime, and not in aīmōlūn, I can* *not execute it.* The sense would not be so beautiful. The following lines shew that this correction was just.

ORESTES.

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S. 43

O R E S T E S.

Say, dearest, Iphigenia, what is it ?

I P H I G E N I A.

I will take advantage of thy frenzy to save thy life.

O R E S T E S.

How ingenious is thy sex ! How fruitful in resources !

I P H I G E N I A.

I will reveal the parricide thou hast committed.

O R E S T E S.

I permit thee; since it must be so, let my misfortunes be made useful to us.

I P H I G E N I A.

I will declare that it is not lawful to sacrifice such victims.

O R E S T E S.

But why ? I would know the reason thou wilt alledge.

I P H I G E N I A.

The victim being polluted, it is necessary he should be purified.

O R E S T E S.

But how will this artifice enable us to carry off the statue ?

I P H I G E N I A.

My design is to have thee purified in the waves of the sea ?

O R E S T E S.

But the statue, Iphigenia, is in the temple.

I P H I G E N I A.

I will pretend that the statue, being profaned by thy touch, must be purified likewise.

O R E S T E S.

Where ? near the southern shore !

I P H I G E N I A.

Yes, in the very place where thy ship lies at anchor.

O R E S T E S.

But will not some other person be employed in this office ? To whose care will the statue be confided ?

IPHIGENIA.

To mine, I only have the privilege to touch it.

ORESTES.

What part must Pylades act in this adventure?

IPHIGENIA.

I will declare that he also is polluted with the same crime.

ORESTES.

Wilt thou do all this unknown to the king?

IPHIGENIA.

How is that possible? No; I will deceive him by these pretences.

ORESTES.

It will not be difficult to make our escape afterwards by the force of our oars.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou, my brother, must take care of all the rest. Our success will then depend on thee.

ORESTES.

All that now remains is to engage thy women to secrecy. Endeavour by persuasive language to prevail on them. Eloquence is natural to thy sex. Do thy part, Iphigenia, I will do mine, and Heaven will crown our wishes.

IPHIGENIA, *to the Chorus.*

My dear companions, on you depends my happiness or misery, my return or my death. The destiny of my brother and kinsman is in your hands. The only favour I require of you is fidelity; that quality so glorious, yet so rarely found, but peculiar to our gentle sex. Women, tender and faithful to their mutual interests, assist each other. Ah, by your silence, at least, favour our escape. By one fortune we must all be saved or perish. It is your interest not to betray us. Your safety depends on mine; by securing my return to my native country, you will secure your own. When I am in Greece, I will not be unmindful of your slavery. Receive my tender embraces. Behold at your feet the daughter of Agamemnon. She conjures you by these hands, by these knees, which she holds embraced; by your parents, by your children, if you have any; by all that is most dear and precious to you, she conjures you not to betray

betray her. Speak, my dear companions, which of you will refuse or give me her consent? Consult among yourselves. If any one among you disapproves of our intended flight, my brother and I must perish.

CHORUS.

Princess, dismiss thy fears of us, and only think of the most effectual means of making thy escape.---We swear (and oh, great Jupiter, be witness to our words), we swear to thee an eternal fidelity.

IPHIGENIA.

May the Gods reward you for this generosity, and crown you with their choicest blessings! Thoas will be here immediately to know whether the sacrifice is performed. Brother, thou and thy friend must now withdraw.

SCENE the FOURTH.

IPHIGENIA.

Oh thou, who formerly didst deliver me from the murdering hands of Agamemnon, oh, great Diana! protect us now. If thou dost not vouchsafe to assist us, what mortal will hereafter give faith to the oracles of Apollo? This barbarous land is not a habitation fit for thee, bright Goddess. Athens, the celebrated Athens, waits thee. Oh quit, for her, a place unworthy of thy presence!

FOURTH INTERLUDE.

CHORUS.

Oh tender bird, that wandering on the rocks, wakes the lone STROPHE I.
echo to repeat thy funeral cries! oh gentle * Halcyon, whose soft language wise mortals understand, for a loved spouse thou weepest!
My sorrows resemble thine: Far from my native country, I sigh for the loved society of Greeks. Oh where shall I find wings to bear me to Diana, the Goddess † of Cynthus! When shall I

* Alcione, the daughter of Eolus, having lost her husband Ceyx, wept for him incessantly, and was changed into a Halcyon. ated in the midst of Delos, an island of the Egean sea, famous for the birth of Apollo, and Diana.

† Cynthus, or Cynth, a mountain situ-

again:

again behold the palms of Delos, those laurels blooming with immortal verdure, those olives consecrated by Latona's maternal pains! Oh that lake *, on whose clear bosom so many swans are sporting! Ah those swans, the Muses friends, when, when shall my glad eyes again behold them !

ANTISTROPHE I.

Alas, with what ceaseless grief have I bewailed my miserable fortune, when after the ruin of my country, I was brought to this barbarous land ! Here I became a slave, a purchased slave, and was destined to the service of Agamemnon's daughter, the priestess of this temple ! Here have I passed my wretched days, confined to altars reeking with the blood of human victims. Oh miserable slavery !---Inured to misfortunes from our birth, they cease to afflict us; they may change their aspect, and the heart knows how to suffer. But ah, when we have once been happy, how dreadful then the change to misery and despair !

STROPHE II.

Blest Iphigenia! how different is thy fate from ours ! Every thing conspires to favour thee. A vessel † waits thee near the shore. Soon will it cut the waves to the sprightly sound of music. Phœbus with his ‡ lyre, Pan with his rural pipe, will soften all thy labours, and smooth thy course to Greece. Soon shall I behold the foaming waves divided by the oars : Soon will the wind swell every sail, and give thy vessel wings, while I am left upon this fatal land.

Why can I not fly above those vast spaces where the sun begins, and finishes his course ? Ah, I would stop my flight over my paternal house. There should I again behold those places so dear to my remembrance, where in the first bloom of youth; and by a mother's tender care supported, I gave my nuptial faith : where I alone charmed all the guests : where I disputed the prize of beauty with my fair companions, when, veiled with becoming grace, and with rich jewels my flowing hair adorned, I was invited to dispute the envied prize.

* Herodot. in *Euterpe*. tells us, that this lake was called Trocheide.

† With fifty rowers, πεντηκόπες.
‡ Of seven strings.

A C T the F I F T H.

S C E N E the F I R S T.

T H O A S, the C H O R U S.

T H O A S.

W HERE is the priestess? Has she initiated the victims?
Are their bodies consuming in the sacred fire?

C H O R U S.

Great king, the priestess comes, she will inform thee herself.

S. C E N E the S E C O N D.

To them I PHIGENIA.

T H O A S.

What do I see? the statue in thy arms, why hast thou taken it
from the holy place?

I PHIGENIA.

Stop, prince; go no farther.

T H O A S.

What is the meaning of this? Sure something extraordinary has
happened in the temple.

I PHIGENIA.

A horrible accident has indeed happened---I shall profane my
lips to repeat it to thee.

T H O A S.

How thou surprisest me! But go on,---speak, Iphigenia.

I PHIGENIA.

The victims thou did'st send me are impure..

T H O A S.

Who has told thee so? What reason haft thou to imagine they
are impure?

I PHIGENIA.

The moment they appeared before the Goddess, she turned aside
her face.

T H O A S.

T H O A S.

Was this motion occasioned by an earthquake?

I P H I G E N I A.

No, self-moved, the statue turned, and closed its eyes with horror.

T H O A S.

What can be the cause of this prodigy? Is it the profanation of the victims?

I P H I G E N I A.

Most certainly. They have committed an atrocious crime.

T H O A S.

Have they murdered any stranger upon the shore?

I P H I G E N I A.

No; theirs is a domestic crime. They came hither loaded with the guilt of it.

T H O A S.

What have they done? I am impatient to know.

I P H I G E N I A.

They have murdered their mother.

T H O A S.

Oh great Apollo! a barbarian is not capable of a crime so horrid.

I P H I G E N I A.

Therefore they are execrated by all Greece, and have been banished by their fellow-citizens.

T H O A S.

But why is the Goddess removed?

I P H I G E N I A.

To expose her to a purer air; the criminals have profaned it.

T H O A S.

Ha! how have you discovered this profanation?

I P H I G E N I A.

After the prodigy related to you, I discovered all.

T H O A S.

T H O A S.

Thy wisdom, Iphigenia, shews to what country thou oweſt thy birth.

I P H I G E N I A.

Couldſt thou have thought it, prince; these strangers, whom I am preparing to ſacrifice, have overwhelmed me with joy.

T H O A S.

Doubtleſs, by bringing thee news from Argos.

I P H I G E N I A.

They have informed me, that Orefteſ, my only brother, is alive.

T H O A S.

They hoped to purchase their lives by telling thee this agreeable news.

I P H I G E N I A.

And that Agamemnon, my father, lives.

T H O A S.

But thou, without ſuffering thyſelf to be moved by fruitleſs pity, haſt come out of the temple to begin the ſacred ceremony?

I P H I G E N I A.

My hatred to an ungrateful country, which doomed me to death, has banished all my compassion for these victims.

T H O A S.

But what ſhall we do with these ſtrangers? Speak freely.

I P H I G E N I A.

The law ordains that they ſhall die: we muſt not violate it.

T H O A S.

Where, then, is the luſtral water, and the ſacred knife?

I P H I G E N I A.

These guilty victims muſt first be puriſhed.

T H O A S.

In the ſea, or in ſome pure stream?

50 I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S.

I P H I G E N I A.

* The sea washes away all the crimes of mortals.

T H O A S.

The victims will then be more acceptable to Diana.

I P H I G E N I A.

And my office will be less dishonoured.

T H O A S.

Well, Iphigenia, the waves of the sea dash against the bottom of the temple, what need, then---

I P H I G E N I A.

Great prince, this mystery requires privacy. An affair of more importance makes it necessary for me to go to a greater distance.

T H O A S.

Go where thou pleasest. I indulge not a criminal curiosity † concerning sacred things.

I P H I G E N I A.

The statue of the Goddess must be purified.

T H O A S.

Certainly so execrable a crime has polluted it.

I P H I G E N I A.

Otherwise I should not have removed it from the sacred place.

T H O A S.

I applaud thy piety, and thy attention to thy holy function.

I P H I G E N I A.

But there is still something more to be done.

T H O A S.

What is it? Speak.

I P H I G E N I A.

The strangers must be loaded with chains.

* Such still is the opinion of the Indians, who attributed to the sea a sovereign virtue for effacing sins. It is related, that Euripides wrote these lines in allusion to a disease, of which he was cured by bathing in the

sea, according to the advice of the Egyptian priests, when he took a voyage to Egypt in company with Plato.

† Such was the profound veneration of the Pagans.

T H O A S.

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S. 51

T H O A S.

Whither can they fly?

I P H I G E N I A.

Thou art ignorant of the arts and treachery of the Greeks.

T H O A S.

Well, let the guards chain them.

I P H I G E N I A.

Give orders likewise that they bring them---

T H O A S.

I consent to it.

I P H I G E N I A.

That they veil their eyes, and give me likewise some guards for an escort.

T H O A S.

Here they are, ready to attend thee.

I P H I G E N I A.

Thou must likewise command the inhabitants---

T H O A S.

To do what?

I P H I G E N I A.

To shut themselves up in their houses.

T H O A S.

They must not behold the sacrifice, then?

I P H I G E N I A.

Ah! that would be an abomination.

T H O A S, *to one of his Officers.*

Go, proclaim throughout the city, a prohibition to be present at the sacrifice.

I P H I G E N I A.

This solicitude, oh Thoas, is a proof of thy tender regard for thy subjects. Thou govern'st them as a father.

T H O A S.

Trust me, Iphigenia, fair object of the public admiration, I am charmed with thy prudence; the praises thou bestowest on me reflect lustre upon thyself.

H 2

T H O A S.

I P H I G E N I A.

Prince, it is necessary that thou should'st remain here near the temple.

T H O A S.

What am I to do ?

I P H I G E N I A.

Thou must purify it.

T H O A S.

I understand thee. At thy return the goddess shall find it so.

I P H I G E N I A.

And when the strangers come out---

T H O A S.

What would'st thou I should do, then?

I P H I G E N I A.

Veil thy august face.

T H O A S.

That my eyes may not be polluted ?

I P H I G E N I A.

Yes, and if I do not return soon---

T H O A S.

Name thy time.

I P H I G E N I A.

Be not uneasy.

T H O A S.

Well, perform the necessary ceremonies at leisure.

I P H I G E N I A.

Oh, may the Gods grant to this expiation the desired success !

T H O A S.

I join my prayers to thine. Adieu..

SCENE the THIRD.

IPHIGENIA, the train of PRIESTS and GUARDS,
the GREEKS in chains.

IPHIGENIA.

The victims come; the ornaments of the Goddess, and her pompous train appear. The youths who wait around her sacred altar, the flaming torches, all is ready for the aweful ceremony; and now I prepare to expiate with blood a bloody crime. Ye citizens, I forbid ye to behold this spectacle. Far, far from hence be those mortals who are consecrated to this temple, and all who preserve their hands inviolate and pure. And you, ye profane, whom Hymen is soon to unite; and you, ye teeming matrons, if you would not be polluted with the crime of these two guilty Greeks, fly the place and sacred ceremony. Oh daughter of Latona, great Diana, if favoured by thee I expiate and sacrifice these two victims (as I intend) thy sacred dwelling will be pure, and all our wishes be fulfilled---Enough---I am silent. Oh Gods, and thou Diana, who hear'st the language of the heart, to thee I trust the rest: oh be propitious, and grant me thy assistance.

SCENE the FOURTH.

The CHORUS.

Begin, my companions, begin, and celebrate the praise of Phœbus and Diana. The fertile vales of Delos * saw the immortal birth. Who, like the blooming Phœbus, can touch the harmonious lyre? Who, like the chaste Diana, can fling the sounding dart? The Delian Goddess quitted her floating isle, and it became immoveable. She carried her divine offspring to the mountain of Parnassus, which was consecrated to Bacchus: there a dragon †, with

* Delos, which was carried about by the waves, till Latona was delivered of Apollo and Diana.

† The city, which lies at the foot of the mountain Parnassus, was called at first by the same name as the mountain. After Phœbus had killed the serpent Python, it was called Python: and lastly, Delphos. This

city was supposed by the ancients to be in the centre of the earth. Jupiter, says Claudian, being desirous to mark the middle of the universe, let fly two eagles, with equal rapidity, the one from the east, the other from the west. They met at Delphos; and on that occasion two golden eagles were placed in the temple of Apollo.

Jupiter.

with a spotted skin, eyes of blood, and teeth of iron, a monster sprung from the earth, lay concealed under a thick laurel, and guarded the subterraneous oracle. Oh, powerful Apollo, thou, although an infant hanging on the arms of a mother, thou pierced'st this monster with thine arrows ! This glorious victory made thee master of the sacred oracle : seated upon a golden tripod, thou unsoldest all futurity to mortals. Thy sanctuary, near which the fountain of lustration flows, is placed in the center of the earth*. By thee, oh bright Divinity ! Themis was driven from the place where she pronounced her oracles. But the Earth, the mother of The-nis, supported her injured daughter. Oh Phœbus! she took from thee the power of predicting future events ; she produced nocturnal spectres ; swarming from her bosom they hover round sleeping mortals, and midst their slumbers disclose to them, the present, the past, and the future. Apollo, amazed, confused, raised his supplicating hands to the throne of Jupiter. All-powerful Deity! he cried, silence these oracles of the night, these delusive dreams, and appease the anger of the Earth. Jupiter smiled, pleased and surprised at the anxiety of his son, and that secret interested motive which engaged him to secure to himself the profitable homage of mankind. He shook his awful head, in sign of approbation. Immediately the dreams all vanished, the nocturnal illusions disappeared. To Phœbus he restored his former honours, and to mortals their former confidence. Such was the origin of thy glory, O temple of Delphos! thou whose oracles delivered in verse, bring'st to thy altars the inhabitants of the whole earth.

SCENE the FIFTH.

A MESSANGER, the CHORUS.

MESSANGER.

Tell me, you who preside over this temple, where shall I find the king ? Run to the palace-gates, and beg him to shew himself.

Jupiter, ut perhibent, spatiū cūm discere vellet
 Naturæ, regni nescius ipse sui,
 Armigeros utriusque duos æqualibus alis
 Misit ab Eois occiduisse plagiis.
 Parnassus geminos fertur junxisse volatus ;
 Contulit alternas Pythius axis aves.

CLAUD.

* Apollodorus, Bibl. B. 1. c. 4. says, that her oracles ; and that the serpent Python endeavouring to hinder his approach, that Apollo having been taught the art of divination by Pan, went to Delphos, where Deity killed him, and took possession of the Themis, the daughter of the Earth, delivered sacred Tripod.

CHORUS.

C H O R U S.

What is the cause of this eager solicitude? Can we approach the king without permission?

M E S S E N G E R.

Oh Heaven! the two Greeks are fled, and, with the assistance of Iphigenia, have carried the statue of the Goddess to their ship.

C H O R U S.

What thou say'st is scarcely credible ---but the king has left the temple:

M E S S E N G E R.

It is fit he should be instantly informed of their escape. Whither is he gone?

C H O R U S.

We know not: do your duty, seek the king, and tell him what has happened.

M E S S E N G E R.

Ah perfidious women! Are not you their accomplices?

C H O R U S.

We! Thou wrong'st us by these suspicions. How were we concerned to facilitate the escape of these Grecians?

M E S S E N G E R.

Well, then, give the king notice of it.

C H O R U S.

Not till we are informed whether he is in the palace.

MESSENGER, *to the guards within the temple.*

Guards, open the gate, and acquaint the king, that I bring him most afflicting news.

S C E N E the S I X T H.

To them T H O A S.

T H O A S.

What is the cause of these clamours about the temple? Who was it that knocked? What mortal spreads terror and amazement here?

M E S S E N -

M E S S E N G E R.

Pardon my zeal, great prince ; these women have deceived me ; they would have sent me away, under pretence that the king was not here, and now I see thee.

T H O A S.

What interest could they have in thus---

M E S S E N G E R.

My sovereign, thou soon shalt know this treachery ; at present somewhat of more importance demands thy ear. The priestess,---Iphigenia,---has carried away the statue of Diana---She is fled with the Greeks---This was the mystery of her feigned expiations.

T H O A S.

Alas, what fatal news dost thou bring me ! What evil genius has suggested to her this treacherous design ?

M E S S E N G E R.

Oh king, thou wilt be surprised to hear, that all this was done to save Orestes.

T H O A S.

Orestes ! who, the son of Clytemnestra !

M E S S E N G E R.

Her brother. She had consecrated him to the Goddess, at the foot of these altars.

T H O A S.

O miracle of falsehood ! for what other name can I give to this crime ?

M E S S E N G E R.

Waste not the time, my sovereign, in imprecations, but provide some remedy against their treachery. Deign to hear what I have to say, and from the account I shall give thee, judge what number of troops will be necessary to stop the fugitives.

T H O A S.

I approve thy counsel. The shore is but at a small distance ; their flight shall not preserve them from my indignation.

M E S S E N G E R.

Scarce were we arrived at the place, near which the Grecian vessel lay concealed, when Agamemnon's daughter made us a sign to let go our hold of the chains, with which, according to thy orders, these victims were loaded, and to remove to some distance, pretending she was going to kindle the sacred fire, and begin the expiation.

expiation. The priestess herself held the chains of these miserable wretches, and walked next them. Thy guards, notwithstanding their suspicions, obeyed, and through respect to the sacred ceremony, retired. Iphigenia, to deceive us, uttered loud cries, sang hymns in a foreign language, and began a dissembled expiation. To us, who were seated at a distance, the ceremony appeared unusually long. We began to be apprehensive that the Greeks would break their fetters, massacre the priestess, and make their escape; but the dread of casting a profane eye upon religious mysteries kept us silent. At length we agreed to be no longer withheld by these vain terrors, but to hazard all, and see how the priestess was employed. Oh Gods, what was our astonishment, when we approached the place, and saw fifty rowers, with their oars held up, and a ship in the sea, ready, like a bird, to take her flight! The Greeks, freed from their chains, appeared upon the poop, giving orders to the mariners: others eagerly mounted the ladders to disentangle the tackling: they hurried from one place to another; all was in motion. Already they were preparing to take Iphigenia on board; when we, enraged at this treachery, suppressed our fears; some of us seized the priestess, the rest mounted upon the cables and the oars into the vessel, took possession of the helm, and forced them to hear us. Why, said we to them, do you attempt to carry away the statue and the priestess from this land? Upon what pretence? You will not surely allege, that you have purchased both with gold? Know, replied one of them, know that I am Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, and the brother of Iphigenia. I have recovered a sister whom I believed to be dead, and I am carrying her to her native country. We, however, being determined not to release the priestess, endeavoured to force them to follow us. We came to blows: for both parties were unarmed. We fought with fury, but the Greeks overpowered us. Fatigued, wounded, and covered with blood, unwillingly we yielded to their superior numbers*; not one of us fled without a wound. We gained an eminence, and then renewed the fight. A shower of stones fell upon the Greeks: but soon we saw archers appear upon the deck, who drove us back with arrows. That

* In the original there is a minute account of the wounds caused by the stones that were thrown, and by their blows; but as it is not agreeable to our manners, I have omit-

ted it, yet without any prejudice to my translation, since there is only the difference of a few words.

moment a wave, favourable to them, brought their vessel nearer the shore. None of the mariners would venture to descend from the ship to bring away Iphigenia. But Orestes, taking her in his arms, quitted the shore, advanced into the sea, and climbing up the side of the ship, placed his sister there; when (oh astonishing prodigy) the statue spoke in these terms: "Bend over your oars, ye Greeks, and cut the foaming waves. You possess the object of your wishes, the Goddess for whose sake you have passed the Euxine sea, and traversed the Symplegades." The mariners answered this voice by a soft murmuring. The sea grew white with foam, and the vessel flew from the shore; but scarce had it reached the streight, when a furious wave and dreadful blast of wind pushed it back again towards us. The rowers struggled against both the wind and sea, the ebbing of which, in spite of all their efforts, brought them back to our shore. "Oh Goddess! cried the daughter of Agamemnon, rising from her seat, oh great Diana! save thy priestess, pardon her flight, and favour her return to Argos. Thou art a sister thyself. Alas! thou knowest what a sister's tenderness is capable of doing." The mariners applauded this prayer; they sent forth cries of joy; they mutually animated each other; they applied their nervous arms with redoubled vigour to the oars; the vessel advanced nearer and nearer to the streight. When I was sent to thee, great prince, some of the mariners had jumped into the sea, and others were preparing to weigh anchor. Lose no time, send chains to bind these wretches. Depend upon it, if the storm does not abate, their hopes of escaping will be vain. Neptune, the God of the sea, who laments the overthrow of Troy, and is enraged against the race of Pelops, will assist thy vengeance. Yes, prince, to thee and thy injured subjects, he will deliver the son and daughter of Agamemnon, the ungrateful Iphigenia, who after having meanly forgot the cruelty exercised upon her at Aulis, has dared to betray Diana; and doubt not but the Goddess will punish her as she deserves.

C H O R U S. (*Aida*)

Oh, unfortunate princess, thou art delivered into the hands of thine enemies, what now will be thy fate! Alas, thou and thy brother will perish!

T H O A S.

Will you not, oh citizens, endeavour to stop these traitors? What hinders you from seizing them? Go, fly, pursue them by land

land * and sea, and deliver the Goddess. Bring back these impious wretches to suffer the punishment † they have deserved----As for you, perfidious women, who have assisted their fraud, you shall be severely punished---but let us instantly pursue these---

S C E N E the S E V E N T H.

To them M I N E R V A.

M I N E R V A.

Stay, Thoas, whither art thou leading these troops? Look up, and know Minerva, who now speaks to thee. I forbid thee to pursue the Greeks, and to animate these armed crowds against them. For know, that it was by the command of the Gods Orestes came into thy dominions. Led by the oracle of Apollo, he came to avoid the rage of the Eumenides, to bring back his sister Iphigenia, and to transport the statue of Diana into my favourite city. Prince, it is I that speaks; hear, and obey. Vainly thou hopest to surprise Orestes in the streight. Neptune, at my request, has preserved him from the fury of the waves, and he has now passed that liquid plain. Orestes, it is to thee that I speak now; (for though far distant, thou wilt hear the voice of a Divinity) depart, and happily pursue thy voyage, accompanied by the statue of the Goddess, and by Iphigenia. When thou arrivest in Athens, remember, that on the confines of Attica, and near the Carystian ‡ shore ||, a sacred spot of ground, there thou must build a temple, and place the statue of Diana in it. She will still keep her name of Taurica, in memory of thy wanderings and frenzy. Mortals shall from henceforward offer her their vows and incense, under the name of the Goddess of Taurica. They shall celebrate the festival of thy deliverance; and thou shalt establish it for a law, that a sword shall then be waved over the head of a human victim, and some drops of blood, sprinkled in honour of Diana, shall hold the place of human sacrifices. Thou, Iphigenia, shalt become the priestess of the Goddess at Brauron, and there funeral honours

* In the original, *on borſebach, and in ſhips.*|| At present my people call it *Alas Arapenidas.*

† To be thrown down a precipice, or to be impaled.

‡ It is over against Carystos, a city of Eubea, towards the southern extremity of the island.

§ Brauron, a city of Attica, where the statue was carried. See PAUSAN. in Att. He places it near Marathon.

shall be paid thee. On thy tomb shall be spread embroidered vestments, bequeathed by women who expired in the pangs of labour. Orestes, thou must procure thy sister's companions their liberty and return into their native country. This thy gratitude to me and them demands. Lastly, remember that in the Areopagus, when thou wast accused of parricide, I gave thee an equal number of suffrages, and thou wast absolved *. I ordain that this custom shall be perpetuated, and extend to all criminals. On these conditions, oh son of Agamemnon! convey thy sister back to her native country ; and do thou, Thoas, suppress thy indignation, and submit to my commands.

T H O A S.

What madness, what impiety, would it be to refuse obedience to the orders of a Divinity ! Yes, great Goddess, although Orestes has robbed me of the celestial statue, I will no longer be his enemy. Is it fit for a mortal to oppose the Gods ? Let him go to Athens : let him place the statue there ; I consent to it. I will send these women back to Greece, and will stop my army and the vessels which were preparing to pursue these fugitives. Such is thy will, oh Goddess, and thou shalt be obeyed. The will of the Gods shall find no rebels here.

M I N E R V A.

Breathe favourable gales, ye winds, and bear to Athens the son of Agamemnon ; speed his voyage. Myself, in respect to the statue of the Goddess, my sister, will accompany his vessel. [To the Chorus.] Go, happy Grecians, and bless the destiny that has preserved you thus unexpectedly.

C H O R U S.

Oh great Divinity, whom Gods and men revere, we obey thy awful voice. Sweet is the hope thou givest us ; welcome the gracious words thou hast pronounced. May victory still shed its lustre on our days, and crown them with immortal fame †.

* Euripides, and other authors likewise, have traced the origin of this custom as far back as Orestes. But some believed that it first took place on account of Themistocles, who was surprised in adultery, and the suffrages for and against him being equal, one of the judges, who was desirous to save him,

said, that it was but just to give a favourable suffrage to the name of the Goddess of Athens, which afterwards passed into a law.

† These lines, with which likewise the Orestes and the Phenicians conclude, are spoke in allusion to the poet, who carried away the prize from his competitors.

O B S E R V A T I O N S

U P O N T H E

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S.

IT is easy to perceive, by the last scene of this tragedy, that the poet's design was to flatter Attica, by celebrating her ancient ceremonies, her religious customs, and her monuments in honour of Diana, as we have observed in the third discourse. This was the motive which induced Euripides to bring Minerva, the Goddess of Athens, before the eyes of the Athenians, and to put those words into her mouth, with which we cannot possibly be affected now. It is not to be doubted, but this desire of flattering the Athenians often engaged him to finish his plays by machines, which he indeed uses very familiarly. But notwithstanding that we are not now interested in these machines, which prejudice us against the poet, because he speaks to us in a stile foreign to our manners; yet this tragedy has so many passages worthy of applause, that those beauties, which are equally perceived in every age, are sufficient to prove, that there were other transitory and temporary beauties over which the curtain is now drawn. But to complete the impression which a single reading must certainly have made, and to separate whatever is likely to weaken it, we will take a cursory view of each act :

The first begins with a prologue, absolutely detached from the piece, and part of it must necessarily seem tedious now. One cannot help being surprised at this affectation of perspicuity in Euripides, to which Sophocles has attained, without any of those improprieties. Iphigenia comes upon the stage to relate the history of her life, and her adventures, not so much to the echoes as to the audience. This is what Seneca has imitated exactly in his play. He is only a Grecian in this fault : but if we overlook it in Euripides, we shall find that his description of the dream is grand and affecting. It is the bud which by degrees opens into the whole beautiful poem.

After

After the prologue, Orestes and Pylades appear. But, between the first, second, and third scenes, there is a break, which is called *Hiatus*: an inconsiderable fault indeed; but which is aggravated by the repetition. It ceases, however, to shock us, when we reflect that Iphigenia goes off the stage, only to make preparations for a funeral ceremony, and returns only to perform it. So that she gives occasion for Orestes to form a scene independent of the two others. After all, this exposition of the subject is not less interesting than that of the *Electra* of Sophocles, with which this poem is nearly connected.

The Chorus, led naturally by the priestess Iphigenia's orders, come to assist her in the melancholly sacrifice, which she makes for a brother whom she supposes dead. Delightful error! which, besides the spectacle it produces, renders Iphigenia's surprize more affecting, when she unexpectedly beholds again that beloved brother, whose loss she had so lately lamented.

The second act opens with a scene, which, lively as it is, needs some indulgence in our days. It is the account given by the shepherd to Iphigenia, of the seizing the two Greeks, their distress, and their combats before they were taken. Iphigenia's reflections upon the sacrifice she is going to perform; upon her insensibility, at which she herself is surprized; upon Helen and Menelaus; upon the barbarity with which she had been devoted to death, produce an admirable effect; as well as the wishes expressed by the Chorus to return to their own country: wishes so natural, that they imperceptibly dispose us for what is to follow, without suspecting the design of the poet, which is not disclosed till the conclusion of the play.

In the third act, the victims are led to the sacrifice; and then begin those pleasing emotions which rise in the minds of the spectators at the sight of a brother, whom the laws of the country doom to die by the hand of a sister. The brother and sister are, without knowing it, in a truly tragical situation. Orestes, unmoved with his approaching fate, and determined to die unknown; Iphigenia in tears, either through an instinct of nature, or from a sentiment of compassion for the unhappy victims, those victims being Greeks. If such an event was to happen, could it possibly happen otherwise than as it is here represented? The questions

tions of eager curiosity asked by the sister, the ambiguous answers of the brother, make the whole art of this situation. The veil rises by slow degrees, and the perplexity increases in proportion as the discovery advances. Iphigenia learns at first, that Mycene is the country of these two captives ; what a source of curiosity to her ! what natural sensibility in her questions, and in the sighs which escape her ! Yet still the secret remains undiscovered : and this first conversation terminates in a resolution taken by the priestess, to give one of the captives his life, on condition, that he will carry a letter from her to her friends in Argos. While she retires to write this letter, the Chorus (as I imagine) follow her, after having in a few words condoled Orestes, and congratulated Pylades : at least they removed to a greater distance. For they could not hear the conversation in the following scene without knowing Orestes, and this would have hastened the mutual discovery, which is not made till a long time afterwards.

The Chorus then having withdrawn, or removed to a greater distance, to leave Orestes and Pylades at liberty to communicate their thoughts to each other, before the one is sacrificed, and the other dismissed ; Orestes, who has no secret which he conceals from his friend, imparts to him the trouble and agitation raised in his mind by the view, the sighs, and the compassion of this unknown priestess. Nothing can be more tender and more affecting, than this instinct of nature, which rouzes him as from a dream, without his being yet able to comprehend what he feels ! At length, that admirable contest of friendship between Orestes and Pylades, each of whom would die for the other, raises to its utmost height, the tender emotion which their presence only had begun to inspire. Pylades seems to us to yield too soon to the importunities of his friend, by whom he is pressed to live, and to leave him to die ; but, if we read over this scene once more, we shall find that Pylades only feigns to yield. He is not willing to offend Orestes, by opposing him unseasonably ; and he chuses rather to be generous, than to seem so. In effect, he yields only in appearance, and still depends upon some happy turn, which will deliver both him and his friend from this extremity. Believe me, says he, calamities, when they have reached their utmost height, often produce the most surprising revolutions.

In the fourth act, Iphigenia, as she enters, artfully gets rid of the Chorus who follow her. She dismisses them, under the specious pretence of summoning the priests to be ready, and to make the necessary preparations; but, in reality, that she may with the greater freedom confide to one of the Greeks the letter which she has in her hand. This scene is a continuation of the two former, which the poet has designedly cut short, and with infinite art interrupted, for the sake of variety, and to escape that languishment which would have been unavoidable, if the mutual discovery had been begun and completed in one unbroken scene. He has therefore protracted this discovery through four or five scenes, part of which belong to the third act, and part to the fourth. The same artful management may be perceived in his Hippolitus, where Phedra begins to reveal her wild passion in one act, and, after having interrupted herself, by veiling her face, ashamed of having said so much, and trembling lest her secret should be known; in the following act, she explains herself with more vehemence, and discovers the whole fatal mystery. This Racine could not imitate for want of the Chorus; and in this consists the art of those beautiful suspensions of Euripides.

Iphigenia, being left alone with the two Greeks, takes proper precautions before she will charge one of them with her message. She requires an oath. Orestes, to secure the life of his friend Pylades, demands one of her likewise. Nothing could have been more artfully imagined, to retard and improve the surprize of the discovery. At length she reads her letter, that Pylades may be able to repeat the contents, if he should happen to lose it by any unavoidable accident. When this letter is read, all the emotion with which Orestes is agitated, is admirably expressed in a single word. As for Pylades, he makes the same impression on the mind of Iphigenia which she had a moment before made on that of her brother. He completes the discovery by the finest turn imaginable, when he speaks these words, so full of nature and simplicity: "Oh
" with what delight can I disengage myself this moment from the
" oath by which thou hast so fortunately bound me! Yes, prin-
" ceph, thou shalt be instantly obeyed. Orestes, receive thy sister's
" letter." There needed no more.

The following scene is an agreeable effect of the precaution used by Euripides in removing the Chorus. The Chorus, after having executed

executed the orders of the priestess, return, and return in that very instant, when Orestes, in a transport of joy, attempts to embrace his sister. The astonishment of Iphigenia, and the perplexity of the Chorus, who knew not what had passed, hasten the explanation of the whole mystery. But Iphigenia, whose situation may be better imagined than expressed, cannot conceive that she should see again in Scythia, and almost under the sacred knife, that brother whom she had lamented as dead. At length her dream begins to be explained, the clouds are dispersed, and she yields to the convincing proofs they give her. The reciprocal joy, the enquiries concerning Clytemnestra, the measures proposed to carry off the statue, and to escape from the tyrant, the irresolute designs, tender solicitudes, fears, hopes, and resources; all are employed, and touched with a masterly hand, till the close of the act, which leaves the spectator wrapt in pleasing expectation of what will be the event of so many wonderful incidents.

The fifth act opens with the arrival of Thoas, for which we are already prepared. His meeting with Iphigenia, who has the statue in her arms, the perplexity of that princess, her artifice, the feigned expiation, and all that follows, although fine and natural, is with difficulty relished by our taste. In the second scene, there is a remarkable expression of Iphigenia's, who, the better to impose upon the suspicious Thoas, advises him to have the two victims loaded with chains. "Art thou ignorant, says she, of the art and "treachery of the Greeks?" It must certainly be that Grecian faith had passed into a proverb among the neighbouring nations of Greece, and that the Athenians understood raillery upon this common reproach. After this there is the interesting spectacle of the two victims guarded, and all the apparatus of a sacrifice to be performed when the expiation is over. We have likewise a scene of the Chorus, singular enough, on account of a stroke of raillery upon Apollo. "Jupiter smiled, pleased and surprised at the anxiety of his son, "and at that secret interested motive which engaged him to secure "to himself the profitable homage of mankind." This must certainly relate to some anecdote which we know nothing of at present. But, if we suppose that it was levelled at Apollo, and the rich temple of Delphos, it shews us that the Athenians did not scruple to rally maliciously upon the enormous wealth of that celebrated temple.

The recital of Iphigenia's flight, the rage of Thoas, and the preparations he makes to pursue them, and, lastly, the appearance of Minerva, finish the unravelling of this piece, in the manner,

and by the motives we have taken notice of in the beginning of these observations. Although this act is less affecting, and has more machinery than the others; yet, according to the genius of the Greeks, it is extremely natural. It is even impossible to help remarking throughout this play an air of truth, peculiar to the Grecian taste; and which consists in persuading the spectator, that the event really happened as he sees it represented, and that it could not happen otherwise. An excellence which we cannot ascribe to the greatest part of our modern tragedies, which, when they succeed, generally leave us in greater admiration of the poet's art, than pleased by that agreeable impression which realizes the action represented.

ALCESTIS:



A L C E S T I S:

A

TRAGEDY OF EURIPIDES.



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The S U B J E C T.

THE design of this tragedy is to shew, that conjugal love, and a due regard to hospitality, are never unrewarded. Both these virtues were held sacred among the Greeks, and formed the general basis of their government; as the respect of children for their parents does among the Chinese. For the Greeks, as well as the Chinese, looked upon the whole state as one family; and believed, that as the happiness of private houses depended in concert upon those who governed them, and upon mutual offices of friendship, so the prosperity of the whole community, which resulted from it, consisted in the strength of that band, which united men with each other, husbands with their wives, a friend with his friend, and the whole state with itself, and with strangers.

Admetus, king of Pheræ * in Thessaly, had received Apollo into his palace, when he was banished from heaven, and received Hercules also at a time, when he had very strong reasons for dispensing with himself from exercising such an act of hospitality. We shall see how this double instance of benevolence was rewarded. With regard to conjugal love, no one certainly ever carried it farther than Alcestis the wife of Admetus; and she was rewarded for it in a manner that never had any example. The subject is so naturally explained in the piece itself, that it would be ill-judged to say any more of it here: but it is necessary to take notice of one circumstance; and that is, a favourite moral of the Greeks, which is directly opposite to our ideas. The great value they set upon life made them conclude, that in the necessity of chusing, whether a young person, or one advanced in age, should die; order and good sense require, that the latter should die for the former, although it were the father for the son. This order was authorized by the Gods, and received by mankind in those times. This notion we cannot admit; but it shews plainly, that even the idea of virtue is not wholly exempt from alteration.

We shall examine this article in the close of our observations upon Alcestis. But, as it is impossible to become Athenians on a

* Pheræ, a province of Thessaly.

The S U B J E C T.

sudden, and to forget we are French, the only precaution I shall require, and which indeed is absolutely necessary, before this piece is read, is to remember, that this polished Greece, whose taste is incontestable by its beautiful antiquities, was not so deficient in judgment, as to admire what was absurd and ridiculous. If, therefore, we find ourselves shocked with any passage in this play, we must allow that either Euripides should have reformed his ideas to please us, or that we should change ours to relish him.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

APOLLO.

HERCULES.

DEATH.

PHERES, father of Admetus.

ADMETUS, king of Pheræ.

ALCESTIS, the wife of Admetus.

A DAUGHTER of Admetus.

EUMELUS, the son of Admetus.

CHORUS of the ancient men of Pheræ.

An OFFICER belonging to Admetus.

A WOMAN attending upon Alcestis.

TRAIN of Admetus and Alcestis.

The SCENE is before the gate of Admetus's palace, in the city
Pheræ in Thessaly.

ALCESTIS:

A L C E S T I S :

A

TRAGEDY OF EURIPIDES.

A C T the F I R S T..

S C E N E the F I R S T..

A P O L L O, coming out of the Palace.

O H palace of Admetus! the scene of my slavery, thou knowest that I, although a Deity, did not blush to see myself debased to a hireling, and to reap the fruit of my toils. * So Jupiter decreed. The God, armed with his thunders, destroyed, my son, my beloved Esculapius. I, to revenge his death, sacrificed the Cyclops, whose fatal art had formed those bolts which robbed me of my son. Such was the offence for which I am punished. When I arrived in this country, I became a shepherd to the son of Pheres: but in reward of his piety, I became also the tutelar Deity of his chaste house. Already this prince drew near his last fatal moment: I deceived the Destinies, and had the good fortune to preserve him from their inevitable darts. Yes, the Goddesses declared, that Admetus should not see the shadowy coasts, provided any other person would take his place in the tomb. Such was the imposed condition. But alas! the unhappy prince has founded his friends, his relations, his aged parents; none, except his wife, would sacrifice their lives to save Admetus. And now Alcestis, the too faithful Alcestis, expires in the arms of her husband; the fatal moment

* No one is ignorant of the antient fable, namely, that Jupiter often punished the Gods, by making them subject to mortals. This absurdity furnished the first Christian writers with great advantages, when they undertook to refute Polytheism.

is arrived. Already her eyes shut out the light : a victim to her tenderness, she must pay this fatal tribute to the king of Hell. And, to aggravate my sorrow, I am constrained to abandon this loved mansion, that I may not pollute my eyes * with the sight of the dead. Ah, the sad decree is irrevokable ! for death approaches. I see that cruel priestess of the shades ; she comes to seize her prey. She would not delay one moment after the time prescribed by Destiny.

S C E N E the S E C O N D.

D E A T H, A P O L L O.

D E A T H.

What do I see ? Art thou here, oh Apollo? What is thy design, by placing thyself at the gate of this palace ? Hop'st thou to ravish from me the tribute due to the Shades ? Art thou not satisfied with having deprived the destinies of one victim ? Why art thou armed with thy bow and arrows ? Would'st thou defend the daughter of Pelias, notwithstanding her promise to devote herself for her husband ?

A P O L L O.

Be not alarmed. I am not unjust : I require nothing unlawful.

D E A T H.

What use hast thou then, for these arms, if thy intentions are equitable ?

A P O L L O.

I bear them now as usual.

D E A T H.

Is it not rather to aid this family ?

A P O L L O.

I confess this family is dear to me, and I am grieved for the unhappy Admetus.

D E A T H.

Then thou intendest to rob me of this second victim ?

A P O L L O.

I have not even robbed thee of the first.

* The Pagans believed that they contracted of the dead. This notion they probably ed a kind of pollution by the sight or touch borrowed from the Jews.

D E A T H

D E A T H.

No ! Why then does Admetus live still?

A P O L L O.

Thou well knowest at what price his life has been purchased. It is his wife thou comest for ; she voluntarily devoted herself to save him.

D E A T H.

Yes ; it is Alcestis, indeed, whom I demand ; and I am resolved to conduct her to the gloomy regions of the dead.

A P O L L O.

Conduct her thither, then ; for I perceive thou art not disposed to gratify my wishes.

D E A T H.

What wouldst thou have me do ? Seize her husband also ? Doubt not of my consent.

A P O L L O.

Not this I mean : but I would have thee seize on * those whose age renders them fitter for death, and yet more unwilling to die.

D E A T H.

I understand thee. Explain thyself farther. I am, like thee, a friend to justice.

A P O L L O.

Suffer Alcestis, then, to reach their age.

D E A T H.

No. Then I should resign a far more glorious triumph, and thou mayst believe I am not insensible to honour.

A P O L L O.

Of what importance is it to thee, whether thy victim be young or old, since at present thou hast a right to the sacrifice of but a single life ?

D E A T H.

It is of more importance than thou imaginest ; the tender age of the victim enhances its value, and the homage paid to me is greater.

* He means Phœbes, or his wife.

A P O L L O.

Let age but plant its furrows in Alcestis' face, and a richer tomb shall then receive her.

D E A T H.

If such a scheme, Apollo, were to be admitted, it would prove very favourable to the rich.

A P O L L O.

What say'st thou ? Is not this a stroke of wisdom, which has escaped thee without knowing it.

D E A T H.

I say, that wealth would purchase years, and the delay of death, at any price.

A P O L L O.

Thou art resolved, then, not to grant me this favour ?

D E A T H.

Most certainly ; surely thou knowest me not ?

A P O L L O.

Yes, cruel fiend, I know thee ; and I know that thou art an object of hatred to the Gods, and of horror to poor mortals.

D E A T H.

Thou hast spoke well ; but nothing shalt thou obtain of me.

A P O L L O.

Relentless as thou art, yet thou wilt be forced to yield. Know'st thou that celebrated hero *, whom Euristus sent into Thrace to bring away the chariot of Diomede ? He will soon be the guest of Admetus, and will force thy victim from thee. Not to thee will I owe the deliverance of Alcestis, yet thou shalt yield her, and I will still be thy enemy.

D E A T H.

Vain threats ! Once more I tell thee, I will grant thee nothing. Alcestis shall in spite of thee see the Stygian shore. I am going

* He means Hercules. Euristus, king of Mycene, in obedience to the orders of Juno, obliged Hercules to undertake the twelve famous labours. Diomede, king of Thrace,

fed his horses with human flesh. Hercules killed him. This was the ninth of his labours.

this.

this instant to hasten the sacrifice, and will begin with this steel *. Those whose hair have been cut, are from that moment devoted to the infernal Gods.

S C E N E the T H I R D.

A crowd of C I T I Z E N S of Pheræ, two Persons of the Chorus speak for the rest.

F I R S T P E R S O N.

Oh Gods ! what means this melancholly silence before the palace of Admetus ?

S E C O N D P E R S O N.

Is there no one to be found, who will satisfy our anxious solicitude concerning the queen ? Must we lament the death of Alcestis ? Does she still live ? that wife so worthy to live; that wife whose unexampled affection for her husband, renders her the object of universal admiration.

F I R S T P E R S O N.

Do any of you hear funeral cries in the palace, striking of hands, and such lamentations as are usual when all hope is lost ?

S E C O N D P E R S O N.

No ; nor do I see any of the guards before the gates. Oh Apollo, thou who art the tutelary Deity of this house, appear, and calm this tempest !

F I R S T P E R S O N.

Alcestis lives still. This silence is a favourable omen : besides, her body is not yet brought out to be deposited in the bosom of the earth.

* Here we have a superstitious custom of the antients, who cut the hair of dying persons, as the first fruits of the sacrifice due to the infernal divinities. As that of Orcus, for example. Virgil, in relating the death of Dido, describes this ceremony, B. 4. v. 698.

Nondum illi flavum Proserpina vertice crinem
Abstulerat, Stygioque caput damnaverat Orco,
Ergo Iris croceis per cœlum roscida pennis
Devolat, & suprà caput adstinet : Hunc ego Diti.
Sacrum jussia fero, teque isto corpore solvo.
Sic ait, & dextrâ crinem fecat ; omnes & unus
Dilapsus calor.

A L C E S T I S.

S E C O N D P E R S O N.

Ah ! let us not admit this flattering hope : on what dost thou find it ?

F I R S T P E R S O N.

Would Admetus, think'st thou, that tender faithful husband, would he perform the funerals of a wife so passionately beloved, without any pomp or magnificence ?

S E C O N D P E R S O N.

It is certain, that I see not in the porch, neither the basin of lustral water *, nor the offerings of hair † : I hear not the cries of the young virgins, nor is there any appearance of a funeral ceremony.

F I R S T P E R S O N.

Yet this is the day appointed by the Fates for Alcestis to descend into her subterranean dwelling.

S E C O N D P E R S O N.

Alas ! What say'st thou ?

F I R S T P E R S O N.

Thou know'st too well my meaning.

C H O R U S, or the principal person of the Chorus.

The misfortunes of the good ought doubtless to be felt by those who resemble them.

STROPHE.

But, alas ! shall we send ships to the famous oracle of Lycia ‡, or of Jupiter Ammon § ; nothing can save Alcestis. Inexorable Fate approaches : the Gods will not now relieve her, and we see none to whom we can address our prayers to move them.

ANTISTRO-
PHE.

Ah ! if the son of Apollo, if Esculapius were alive, Alcestis would soon return from the gloomy realms of night, and from the dreadful gates of death. Esculapius, before Jupiter crushed him with his bolts, could with new life animate the dead ; but he is now no more, and with him hope is lost.

* In the original, *which they draw from a fountain made use of in washing the dead.*

† In the original, *which they spread before the door.*

‡ Lycia, a province of Asia, so called from Lycas the son of Pandion.

§ Ammon, a small spot of ground in the desert of Barcos. It was celebrated formerly

for the temple and oracle of Jupiter Ammon.

All that piety, that love, could dictate to our kings, have been performed. The altars of the Gods reek with the blood of slaughtered victims; but, alas! our miseries are not yet relieved.—Ha! a woman, drowned in tears, comes out of the palace. Oh Gods! She comes to tell us fatal news; for there affliction reigns, and her tears are but too just.

S C E N E the F O U R T H.

One of ALCESTIS' WOMEN, the CHORUS.

C H O R U S.

Tell us, we conjure thee, does Alcestis still live?

W O M A N.

She lives, and yet she lives no longer.

C H O R U S.

What dost thou mean?

W O M A N.

She expires; her last moment is approaching fast.

C H O R U S.

Oh wretched Admetus, what a wife wilt thou lose!

W O M A N.

Unhappy prince, he foresaw not this misfortune!

C H O R U S.

There is no hope, then.

W O M A N.

None. Fate is too powerful; and all our cries are fruitless.

C H O R U S.

All is over then, and preparations will be made for her funeral.

W O M A N.

Every thing is already prepared for that sad ceremony: her husband will bury her soon.

C H O R U S.

Comfort thyself with the reflection, that Alcestis' death is glorious;

ous ; that she is the most faithful wife the sun in his wide course beholds.

W O M A N.

Well does she deserve this praise : never was conjugal affection carried farther. What can a woman, who adores her husband, do more than sacrifice her life for him ? All Pheræ is witness of Alcestis' heroic sacrifice. But her behaviour in these last fatal moments, affords us a new subject for admiration. As soon as she perceived her death drew near, she bathed herself in the pure waters of a running stream. She ordered her richest garments to be brought *, and adorned herself with graceful elegance. Then stopping before the statue of Vesta, "Oh Goddess ! said she, soon shall I descend to the dark shades of death : yet, ere I go, receive my last adoration. Behold me prostrate at thy feet, and grant my dying prayer. Oh Goddess ! be thou a mother to my orphan children, give to my son a wife whom he can love, and to my daughter a husband worthy of her. May their fate be happier than their mother's; may they not like her die in the bloom of youth, but fill up the measure of their happy days in their own natal land !" After this short prayer, she visited every altar in the palace of Admetus; she crowned them with flowers, and strewed leaves of myrtle round them. Before each she kneeled, and offered up her devotions : No tear was seen to fall from her eyes ; no sigh escaped her; her beauty is not impaired, though death has laid his icy hand upon her. When she had finished her devotions, she returned suddenly to her apartment, and threw herself upon her nuptial bed. There she began to give free course to her tears, and thus tenderly complained: "Dear witness of my affection to a husband, for whom I die this day, listen to my parting sorrows ; for oh ! fatal as thou hast been to me, I love thee still. Yes, it is to thee I owe my death. The fear of violating that faith I owe to thee and to Admetus, robs me of life. But yet I die contented. Should'st thou receive another bride, she may perhaps be more fortunate ; but cannot be more chaste or faithful than Alcestis." Here she ceased; and bending o'er her bed, tenderly kissed it, while a torrent of tears flowed from her eyes. After having soothed her grief in this manner, she at length quitted that bed of which she had taken so pathetic a farewell, and came out of her apartment:

* In the original, *She took them out of her cedar coffers,*

but

but soon her tenderness recalled her to that soft scene. Again she left it, and again returned to contemplate it once more, and renew her parting sorrows. Mean time, her children hung on her garments in speechless grief; the dying mother took each of them by turns in her arms, and lavished her last embraces on them. The slaves wandered throughout the palace, lamenting the destiny of their queen. She called them all by their names: she held out her hand to them; even the meanest of them she condescended to console, and received their melancholly farewell. Such is the sad spectacle which the palace of Admetus now affords. Had he died himself, he would have lost but one life only: but, in losing Alcestis, he suffers more than death, and lives to languish in utterable woe.

C H O R U S.

Unhappy prince! he has but too much cause for grief.

W O M A N.

Oppressed with agonizing sorrow, he holds his beloved Alcestis in his arms, and conjures her not to leave him. Alas! an inward fire consumes her, and preys upon the principles of life. Already her lifeless hands have lost their strength and use. She breathes with difficulty; yet still would snatch a few short moments from relentless death. She desired to be brought hither to view the sun once more; the sun, of which she now must take an everlasting leave. I will go in, and acquaint the king with your arrival. The affection you express for him, and for Alcestis, is so much the more valuable, as subjects are seldom known to be concerned for the misfortunes of their sovereigns.

S C E N E the F I F T H.

C H O R U S.

Oh great Jupiter! what will be the event of these distresses? To what hast thou doomed our sovereign?—Ha! art thou already returned? Do'st thou bring a confirmation of our misfortunes? Must we then cut off our devoted hair, and wear the garb of sorrow?

S C E N E

S C E N E the S I X T H.

Which serves as an Interlude.

Alcestis' W O M A N, the C H O R U S.

W O M A N.

Ah, it is past, my friends! hope is no more! Yet still we attempt to move the Gods by prayers and sacrifices. Their power knows no bounds. It is now, Apollo, that thy assistance is most necessary; compassionate the wretched king. Alas, by thee he was preserved from death! Oh save his other self! save his Alcestis, and stay the murdering hand of Pluto!

C H O R U S.

Oh son of Pheres! oh unhappy prince! a loss like this is far more dreadful than the sad end of desperate lovers, who wildly rush on death. Soon shalt thou see thy wife become the prey of the relentless tyrant of the shades---And behold they bring Alcestis hither; her weeping husband follows her. Mourn, Pheræ, mourn thy queen! Ah, the gates of Pluto's dreary palace are open to receive her!---Alas! few are the blessings of the happiest marriage, compared with its afflictions. Admetus is a striking example of this truth. Soon will he be deprived of all his foul holds dear, and from this fatal moment his days will wear away in anguish and despair.

A C T the S E C O N D.

S C E N E the F I R S T.

A D M E T U S, A L C E S T I S, supported by her women, the C H O R U S, T R A I N, the two C H I L D R E N of Alcestis.

A L C E S T I S, with a faint voice.

Oh sun, oh thou bright light of day, ye fleeting clouds!---

A D M E T U S.

Ah, my Alcestis, the sun which sees us, sees us innocent; yet over-

overwhelmed with misery, neither of us have offended the Gods, and yet thou diest.

A L C E S T I S.

* Oh land, oh palace, oh nuptial bed of Iolcos, my country!--

A D M E T U S.

Yield not to thy weakness, dear Alcestis; oh, do not, do not leave me. Implore the Gods for mercy; they yet can succour us.

A L C E S T I S.

+ Already I behold the double oar; I see the fatal bark. Already the grim ferry-man of the dead calls me with horrid cries: who stops thee? he says, descend; why this delay? all is prepared for thy passage.

A D M E T U S.

Cruel voyage! Oh, my Alcestis, into what a gulph of miseries are we fallen?

A L C E S T I S.

Ah Admetus, they drag me, they drag me to the infernal court. Do' st thou not see him; it is Pluto himself, who hovers o'er me--- he fixes his horrid looks upon me----Ah barbarous Deity, what would' st thou have? Leave me----leave me, I conjure thee---Oh horror! into what unknown regions am I entering!

* Iolcos, a city of Thessaly, in the gulph where he defends Euripides, and his Alcestis in particular, against some moderns, has of Volo. Jason was born there.

+ Racine, in his preface to Iphigenia, thus translated this beautiful passage.

Je vois déjà la rame, & la barque fatale;
J'entends le vieux Nocher sur la rive infernale;
Impatient il crie, On t'attend ici-bas,
Tout est prêt; descends, viens, ne me retarde pas.

These terrors expressed by Alcestis, and which present to her imagination Hell opened to receive her, and Charon hastening her away, are certainly in the taste of that sublime which Longinus describes in his

treatise on that subject; and it appears that Euripides, who was a great imitator of Homer's descriptions, had in his view the following one, in the 20th book of the Iliad.

Deep in the dismal regions of the dead,
Th' infernal monarch rear'd his horrid head,
Leap'd from his throne, left Neptune's arm shou'd lay
His dark dominions open to the day,
And pour in light on Pluto's drear abodes,
Abhor'd by men, and dreadful ev'n to Gods.

A L C E S T I S.

A D M E T U S.

Oh miserable journey to thy friends ; but far more miserable to thy husband, and thy children.

A L C E S T I S, [to her women].

Lay me upon this bed : my strength forsakes me ; pale death has seized me ; my eyes grow dim ; dark clouds have overshadowed them. Oh, my children, my dear children, you have no mother now. Yet, long may you enjoy the cheerful light of day !

A D M E T U S.

Good heaven ! why, why am I forced to hear these words ? They tear my heart : a thousand deaths are not so cruel ! Oh Alcestis ! I conjure thee, in the name of the Gods, do not abandon me, abandon not thyself. Thy Admetus dies, if thou diest : my life is in thy hands. Oh, my Alcestis, live, live and preserve thy husband.

A L C E S T I S.

My dear Admetus, I am dying ; draw near, and listen to my last words, which I reserve for thee. My affection for a husband, whom I loved better far than life, brings me this day to the tomb. Yes, my dear Admetus, I die for thee. I might have lived, thou knowest it, and have reigned happily. Which of the Thessalian princes, on whom I should have deigned to fix my choice, but would have given me his hand, to share my crown ? But I was not able to support the grief of living without thee, and to behold these pledges of our love deprived of such a father. I might have hoped to enjoy a long and happy life, yet willingly I sacrificed it ; and what neither tenderness nor honour could exact from those who gave thee being, thy wife alone has done. Doubtless it became thy parents to save the life of an only son, at the expence of theirs ; their age does not permit them to hope for another child. I might then have lived : thou wouldest have accomplished thy course ; nor have been reduced to weep a tender wife, and see thy children at these early years without a mother. The Gods have otherwise decreed for us : I resolved to die for thee, and I do not repent this sacrifice. But, in reward for such a benefit as life, I require of thee a return of tenderness not equal (for what can equal the sacrifice of life ?) but at least so just, so lawful, that thou canst not refuse to give it. Thy natural rectitude, and thy love for these children, secure the grant of my request. Suffer them not, my dear Admetus,

Admetus, to know any other master but thyself in their paternal dwelling: suffer them to preserve that rank in it destined for them by their birth: give them no envious step-mother, who may be barbarous enough to treat like strangers these children who are no less thine than mine. This is the only favour I implore of thee. Who knows not the sordid jealousy of a second wife, and what misery she prepares for the unhappy fruits of a former marriage? A serpent rouzed to rage, is far less dreadful, and less dangerous. My son, indeed, has some resource: nature has given him a defender in him whom he calls by the soft name of father, and from whom he receives the tender name of son. But oh, my dearest daughter, what will be thy destiny? How wilt thou pass with decency the years of thy virgin state? What spouse wilt thy father chuse for thee? Who is there that will not take an inhuman pleasure in wounding thy fame? For, alas, my child, thy mother will not have the consolation to give thee a husband from her hand: she will not be in a condition to console thee in the pangs of labour, when the presence of a mother is so soothing. I, alas, must die, and in a few fleeting moments. Ah, death knows no delays; he waits not till the following day, nor to the third of the month*. The fatal period is arrived; yet a moment longer, and I am numbered with the dead. Adieu, Admetus; adieu, my children; be happy all of you: and thou, my dearest husband, live, and enjoy the glory of having once possessed a wife so faithful, and you, my children, boast that you had Alcestis for a mother.

C H O R U S.

Princes, dismiss thy fears; we will take upon us to answer for thy husband, that he will comply with all thou askest. Ah, would he not, indeed, be lost to reason and to gratitude, if he refused to grant such just demands?

A D M E T U S.

Yes, my dearest Alcestis, thou shalt be obeyed; rely upon the love I bear thee: thou wert my wife whilst thou lived, thou shalt continue to be so even after thy death. No other Thessalian vir-

* Alcestis, when she says, that death will not wait till the third day of the month, alludes, I believe, to a custom among the Greeks, who paid their debts on the first day of the month: or it is probable, by this passage of Euripides, that merciful creditors gave their debtors a delay of one or two days, which death does not.

gin shall call me husband, however distinguished for her birth and beauty. These dear pledges which thou leavest me, shall possess all my heart. Oh preserve them to me, ye gracious Gods, if I must lose their mother. Think not, my dear Alcestis, that a year shall be the period of my mourning and my grief: no, my mourning shall last as long as my life; as long as my love for thee; as long as my hatred for parents, whose fruitless tenderness confined itself to bare professions only. It is thou, my Alcestis, thou alone, who for my sake was lavish of the dearest blessing, and saved my life by sacrificing thy own. But oh, will not my life thus purchased, be condemned to ceaseless groans? It shall; for I renounce all joy for ever; never more will I share the social feast, or join the gay assembly; never more shall this palace resound with songs and music; no more shall these fingers fly over the lyre, and extract those melting airs, which once had power to charm me; no more shall my voice join the soft Lydian flute: all the delights of life will perish with thee. Yet I will not lose thee all, my dear Alcestis, my ingenious love will find out new methods to keep thee present to my eyes. The artist's hand shall be employed to form thy dear resemblance for me*. I will press the lovely image in my arms; I will place it on my couch, fall at its feet, and call it my dear Alcestis, and believe I see thee still, still speak to thee, and enjoy thy loved society. Ah! weak consolation, poor resource for love or grief like mine! yet to this, my sorrow oft will fly: at least, thy shade wilt bless my eyes in dreams.--Oh, my Alcestis, had I the magic power of song like Orpheus! could I like him charm the relentless daughter of Ceres, and her inexorable lord, and bring thee back from the dread shores of Cocytus! thither, like him, I would descend: nor the tremendous Cerberus, nor the stern ferryman of the dead, should force me to return, unless thou wert permitted to revisit earth again. Ah, fruitless wishes! by death only can I gain a passage to those gloomy shades. I come, my dear Alcestis; I follow thee; prepare the mansion where thou and I must dwell eternally: thy tomb shall hold me also; dying it shall be my command to place me there; death itself shall not have power to separate two hearts, which such a passion has united.

C H O R U S.

Prince, we share thy griefs, as well through our friendship for thee, as our veneration for Alcestis.

* This is the original of that kind of idolatry of which Solomon speaks.

A L C E S T F I S, *to her children.*

My dearest children, let us be comforted; you have heard your father swear an eternal faith to me: he renounces for ever a second bride.

A D M E T U S.

Yes, such was my promise; I now repeat it, and never will I violate it.

A L C E S T F I S,

On this condition, then, receive these children from my hands; to thee I trust them.

A D M E T U S.

I receive them as a precious gift from a most dear hand.

A L C E S T I S.

Take my place, then, and be a mother as well as father to them.

A D M E T U S.

Oh fatal necessity! which constrains me to it, since they lose thee.

A L C E S T I S.

Alas, my children! I would live for you, but I must die, and leave you.

A D M E T U S.

What will become of me when I have lost thee?

A L C E S T I S.

Time will asswage thy grief: the dead are nothing to the living.

A D M E T U S., *in tears.*

Oh, my dear Alcestis, take me with thee; I conjure thee by the Gods; oh take me with thee to the shades!

A L C E S T I S.

It is sufficient, my dear Admetus, that I die, and die for thee.

A D M E T U S.

Ye barbarous Destinies, of what a treasure do you deprive me!

A L C E S T I S.

Ah! my heavy eye-lids fall; a thick mist involves my sight.

A D M E T U S.

Oh dreadful sounds! ---Wilt thou, then, abandon me, Alcestis?

A L C E S T I S.

A L C E S T I S.

I am no more; look upon me as if I had never been.

A D M E T U S.

Alcestis, my dear Alcestis! ---raise thy eyes, leave not thy children.

A L C E S T I S.

Unwillingly I leave them. Well, then, let them receive my last embraces.

A D M E T U S.

Oh, turn thine eyes towards them---look on them once more, my dear Alcestis. ---Alas!

A L C E S T I S.

Ah, I die; it is done.

A D M E T U S.

Oh, my unkind Alcestis, wilt thou, wilt thou abandon us?

A L C E T I S, *expiring.*

Farewel.

A D M E T U S, *veiling his face.*

There death has struck me also.

C H O R U S.

She is dead. Admetus no longer has a wife.

S C E N E the S E C O N D.

ADMETUS, the CHILDREN, and the CHORUS,
about the body of Alcestis.

E U M E L U S, her son.

Oh misery! my mother is descended to the shades. She no longer enjoys the light of day: I have no mother now. Ah, look my father, look at these eyes, covered with the dark shades of death: look at these motionless hands. Oh my dearest mother, hear me; I conjure thee, hear me. It is I; it is thy son that calls thee, that presses thy cold lips.

A D M E T U S.

In vain thou call'st her. She no longer hears thy voice: she sees

sees thee not. Ah, my dear children, how cruel is this stroke to all of us !

E U M E L U S.

And has she then left me ; left me at these early years ! Oh my father ! Oh miserable wretch, to be deprived of such a mother ! Oh my sister ! this loss is thine, alas : but chiefly thou, my dearest father, art to be pitied : thou who hast not been allowed to reach with her to a happy old age ! Oh mother ! thy wretched family dies with thee.

C H O R U S.

Fatal necessity ! Admetus, thou must support this sad reverse of fortune. Thou art not the first whom death has deprived of an amiable and tender wife : thou wilt not be the last. Alas ! art thou ignorant that we are but born to die ?

A D M E T U S.

I know it but too well. This stroke was not unexpected, and was therefore more severely felt.--But now these dear remains must be removed, and receive the last pious duties from me. Assist me, friends, and sing alternatively funeral songs in honour of the relentless king of hell. Let the Thessalians, my subjects, join with me in performing these just rites. As their king, I command universal mourning ; let them cut off their hair, and put on sable habits. Prepare the chariots, and cut off the flowing manes of all the horses. It is my command also, that the soft sounds of the lyre and flute be heard no more throughout the city, till the moon has twelve times filled her orb. Alas, never again can I perform the obsequies of a person so dear, so precious to me. What honours are not due from me to a wife, who had the courage and generosity to take my place in the grave !

S C E N E the T H I R D.

Which serves for the Interlude.

The body of Alcestis is carried away to be adorned ; Admetus, his children, and the whole court, follow it, while the Chorus remain to sing the funeral songs.

C H O R U S.

Oh, daughter of Pelias, who now dwells in Pluto's gloomy ^{STROPHE II.} palace, receive our last farewell. Know, thou fierce tyrant of the Shades,

Shades, and thou, grim pilot of the dead, who, seated at the helm, dividest the black waves of Styx, know, that a brighter virtue than Alcestis never passed the bitter stream of Acheron!

ANTISTROPHE I.

For thee, Alcestis, the poets shall invoke their muse. Thy praises shall be celebrated in hymns sung to the harmonious lyre *. Thy wondrous love shall be the subject of every poet's song: but chiefly in the spring, during the solemn festivals † which Athens and Sparta celebrate in honour of Apollo. - Thy glorious sacrifice shall crown thee with immortal fame.

STROPHE II.

Oh that I could redeem thee from the dark mansions of the infernal king, and make thee pass again the black Cocytus! Thou whose matchless tenderness for a husband has saved his life by sacrificing thine own, light lye the earth upon thy gentle bosom:--- and oh, let no fears of thy Admetus' faith disturb thy peaceful shade; if it were possible that he could violate the vow he made thee, and abandon himself to the charms of a second marriage, to us and to thy children he would become an object of everlasting horror.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Strange love of life in those who gave him birth! of life so short as theirs, white hairs can promise them! neither would die to save him, though threatned with approaching death; a death inglorious and unlamented: but thou, Alcestis, in the bloom of youth, died for thy husband. Oh, may the Gods bestow on me a wife whose tenderness and fidelity may equal thine; but happier in her fate, may she with me fulfil the measure of her days! Alas, this blessing Heaven only grants to a few favoured mortals.



A C T the T H I R D.

S C E N E the F I R S T.

H E R C U L E S, the C H O R U S.

H E R C U L E S.

Ye inhabitants of Pheræ, say, is Admetus in the palace?

* In the original, *with seven strings, and made of a tree which grows upon the mountains.*

† The festivals here mentioned by the Chorus were games and musical contests, which were celebrated at Athens and Sparta on the seventh of April, and lasted nine days, when

the moon was in its full. These poetical contests being instituted in honour of Apollo, they were called Carneades, from Carnus, a famous poet and musician, the son of Jupiter and Europa, and a favourite of Apollo's.

C H O R U S.

C H O R U S.

Thou wilt find him there, great Hercules. But deign, I pray thee, to satisfy our curiosity; on what design dost thou come to Thessaly, and to this city in particular?

H E R C U L E S.

I am come in obedience to the commands of Eurystheus.

C H O R U S.

To what new wanderings has he condemned thee?

H E R C U L E S.

I am going to carry off the steeds of Diomedes *.

C H O R U S.

How wilt thou be able to execute this enterprize? Art thou acquainted with any persons in that country?

H E R C U L E S.

No; I never was in the land of the Bistonians †.

C H O R U S.

Dost thou know, that the carrying off these horses will cost thee a bloody combat?

H E R C U L E S.

Yes; but how can I elude my orders?

C H O R U S.

Thou must kill Diomedes, or perish.

H E R C U L E S.

True; but this will not be the first trial of my valour.

C H O R U S.

But what wilt thou gain by this victory?

H E R C U L E S.

The steeds, which I am to carry to Eurystheus.

C H O R U S.

There is still another obstacle to thy success. How wilt thou curb their fury ‡?

H E R C U L E S.

Is it true what report says, that they breathe fire and flames?

* In the Greek, *King of Thrace*. † Bistonia, a country in Thrace, between the river Nestus and Hebrus. ‡ In Greek, *by the reins*.

A L C E S T I S.

C H O R U S.

They are so fierce, that they tear men to pieces *.

H E R C U L E S.

Wild beasts do so; but men are not the prey of horses.

C H O R U S.

Believe thine eyes, then. Thou wilt see their den reeking with human gore.

H E R C U L E S.

From whom is he descended who feeds them thus?

C H O R U S.

Mars is his father: his kingdom is that part of Thrace which takes its name from the hollow bucklers in use there, and which is known to be so fruitful in gold.

H E R C U L E S.

It is well; this is an enterprize worthy of Hercules: severe, but glorious destiny! which still ordains, that I must combat with the sons of Mars. Lycaon first, then Cycnus, and Diomedes is the third who offers himself to my arm. I must fight with him, and with his steeds: it matters not; the son of Alcmena shall never be seen to tremble at the sight of the most dreadful enemy.

C H O R U S.

Behold Admetus himself.

S C E N E the S E C O N D.

To them A D M E T U S.

A D M E T U S.

Oh hero, descended from Jupiter and Perseus †, may'st thou be ever happy!

H E R C U L E S.

Receive from me the same kind wishes, powerful king of the Thessalians.

A D M E T U S, *figbing*.

Oh that the Gods would grant them! but I receive them as the effects of an undoubted friendship.

* In Greek, with their *fire arms*.

and Alceus of Araphition, the husband of

† Perseus and Danoe were the children of Alcmena, who had Hercules by Jupiter. Jupiter. Perseus was the father of Alceus.

A L C E S T I S.

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H E R C U L E S.

But say, Admetus; why these marks of mourning, this thorn hair! ---

A D M E T U S.

This hair I was preparing to carry to the tomb of---

H E R C U L E S.

Whose tomb? Oh Heaven! is one of thy children dead? The Gods preserve thee from suffering such a loss!

A D M E T U S.

Thanks to the Gods, my children are alive.

H E R C U L E S.

It is then a father thou mournest for. Ah, his great age gives me but too just a cause for fear! ---

A D M E T U S.

Dismiss that fear: my parents are still alive.

H E R C U L E S.

How! hast thou then lost Alcestis thy wife?

A D M E T U S.

Of her I may say two very opposite things.

H E R C U L E S.

Lives she, or not?

A D M E T U S.

She is alive, and yet she is not: it is her fate that makes me miserable.

H E R C U L E S.

Still I cannot comprehend thee: unfold this enigma, I beseech thee.

A D M E T U S.

Art thou ignorant of the destiny that awaits her?

H E R C U L E S.

I know she has engaged herself to die for thee.

A D M E T U S.

Bound by this fatal promise, can I reckon her among the living?

H E R C U L E S.

Ah, do not anticipate grief: too soon wilt thou lament her.

A L C E S T I S.

A D M E T U S.

Alcestis is dead : for those who are soon to die, I look upon as dead already.

H E R C U L E S.

Yet still there is some difference between the dead and those that live.

A D M E T U S.

Thou art of this opinion, Hercules ; but I have reasons for thinking otherwise.

H E R C U L E S.

Why dost thou keep me in suspence, then ? What friend is it whom thou lamentest ?

A D M E T U S.

I mourn the death of a woman----We have all this time been speaking of another.

H E R C U L E S.

Was she whose loss thou weepest a stranger, or allied to thy family ?

A D M E T U S.

She was both.

H E R C U L E S.

How ! both ! If a stranger, whence did it happen, that she passed her life in thy palace ?

A D M E T U S.

Being confided to my care after the death of her father, she was bred up there.

H E R C U L E S.

I take part in thy affliction, Admetus ; but in the situation thou now art, I would not importune thee with my presence.

A D M E T U S.

What dost thou mean ?

H E R C U L E S.

I will seek another abode.

A D M E T U S.

No ; I cannot suffer thee to depart. Add not this to my other misfortunes.

H E R C U L E S.

The visit of a stranger is unseasonable in a house of mourning.

A D M E T U S.

A D M E T U S.

Let us think no more of the dead, but deign to enter my palace.

H E R C U L E S.

Consider, Admetus, how improper it would be for me to be thy guest, when all thy family is in tears.

A D M E T U S.

Thou shalt be conducted to a distant apartment in the palace, which I reserve for strangers.

H E R C U L E S.

Permit me to leave thee, Admetus : my obligations to thee will not be lessened.

A D M E T U S.

No, Hercules ; I have already told thee, thou art not at liberty to be the guest of any other. [To his attendants.] Open the most retired apartments : tell the slaves to prepare a sumptuous feast. [To the guards.] Do you shut the vestibule in the middle ; it is not fit that cries and tears should disturb the pleasures of a feast. We ought to spare the guest whom we receive, the melancholly preparations for a funeral. [Hercules goes into Admetus' palace.]

S C E N E the T H I R D.

A D M E T U S. the C H O R U S.

C H O R U S.

Why would'st thou, prince, sinking as thou art under a load of affliction, receive a stranger in thy house ?

A D M E T U S.

What could I do ? Had I shut the gates of my palace and my city upon a friend, would you have praised me for it ? No, certainly ; my griefs would not have been less sensibly felt, and my guilt would have been greater. I should have violated the laws of hospitality, which I have ever respected : laws so exactly observed by this friend, when I went into the barren region of the Argives ; and to the miseries I suffer already, I should have added the eternal infamy of rendering my house odious to strangers.

C H O R U S.

But if Hercules be so sincerely thy friend, why dost thou conceal thy affliction from him ?

ADMETUS.

A L C E S T I S;

ADMETUS.

I know this hero well. If he had entertained the least suspicion of those misfortunes I groan under now, he would not have honoured me with his presence. He will blame me too for what I have done: but though he should call me imprudent, though he should load me with reproaches, my pure and unstained house shall still respect the sacred laws of hospitality; it never knew the guilt of turning the steps of strangers from it. [He goes out.]

SCENE the FOURTH.

The CHORUS.

STROPHE I. Oh palace of Admetus, oh worthy abode of Gods! no wonder that Apollo deigned to reside within thy hospitable walls, and blushed not to become the shepherd of thy numerous flocks, nor to fill thy hollow valleys, and the smiling meads around thee, with the harmonious music of his rural lyre!

ANTISTROPHE I. Then were the fierce lynx's seen to feed with lambs. The lions quitted the hills of Thessaly to listen to thy lays. Divine musician! around thee skipped young fawns, who in crowds deserted the forests, drawn by the soft melody of thy songs.

STROPHE II. Happy Admetus! the favourite of a God! it is to Apollo that thou owest a sheepfold so fruitful and so fair, beside the lake of Bebie *, and that thy fields extend towards the west, even within view of the Molosses; while on the east, thy empire seems to know no other bounds than mount Pelion, and the Egean sea.

ANTISTROPHE II. With thee, Admetus, how sacred are the laws of hospitality! Thou hast just lost a lovely and beloved wife, and while thou weepest her early fate, a stranger comes. Then, generous prince, thy sorrow was confined to thy own bosom; thy sighs were all supprest; thy tears, which flowed in spite of thee, by painful force withheld; and to thy guest thy hospitable gates were open instantly. Such is the conduct a generous mind suggests. Every gift

* A lake between Pheræ and Magnesia, from which the neighbouring plains take the name of Beboide. The following passage is perplexed. The Chorus do not mean that the empire of Admetus extends on one side to the Molosses, which are at the extremity of Epirus, nor that on the other side, it reaches to mount Pelion; but if I am not

mistaken, the Chorus mean, that Admetus might behold all this tract of land, and so seem to command it, according to that sprightly line of Benserade.

Et si tout n'est d moi, tout est à mes regards.
To be convinced, we need only examine the map;

of wisdom is united in a heart where candor and benevolence bears sway. Thy piety, Admetus, doubt it not, shall meet its just reward.

S C E N E the F I F T H.

A D M E T U S, the C H O R U S.

A D M E T U S.

My loved friends, whose presence affords my afflicted heart so soft a consolation, Alcestis will in a few moments be carried to the funeral pile, and from thence to the tomb; do you attend the melancholy procession, pay her the last duties, and let your lamentations shew your affection for your queen, who leaves her palace never more to enter it again.

C H O R U S.

Prince, I see thy aged father slowly approaching. He comes to attend the procession, and his servants bring gifts and ornaments for Alcestis' tomb.

S C E N E the S I X T H.

The procession is seen.

P H E R E S enters, followed by servants bearing presents for Alcestis' tomb.

P H E R E S.

My son, I share in thy affliction. Thy loss, it is true, is great: See the observations upon
Alcestis deserved thy tenderest affection; but yet, cruel as this loss this scene.
is, thou must support it patiently. Receive these rich vestments from my hand to grace her tomb: a wife who sacrificed herself for thee cannot be too highly honoured. It is to Alcestis that I owe the happiness of preserving my son: she would not suffer a wretched father to waste his age in mourning. Oh, thou deliverer of both the son and father! who, by this heroic deed, hast proposed a glorious example to thy sex. Oh, thou who hast resigned the light of day, ever amiable Alcestis, receive my last farewell! May thy gentle shade enjoy repose in Pluto's dark dominions! may many wives like thee be found, and may the torch of Hymen be kindled for love and faith like thine, or quenched be the flame for ever!

ADMETUS.

I did not invite thee, Pheres, to these funerals ; and that I may not yield to thee in any thing, know, that thy presence here is now unwelcome to me. Carry back these vestments ; they shall not be spread upon Alcestis' corps. Her tomb shall not be enriched with gifts from thee. Thou sawest me at the point of death; then was thy time to weep; but then what didst thou do ? Do tears become thee now ? thou who refused'st to shield me from the threatened danger : thou who, though bending under the weight of years, couldst shun a necessary death, and suffer the young and blooming Alcestis to sacrifice her life for me. Away, I am not thy son ; I do not acknowledge thee for my father. She who calls herself my mother, never bore me ; I am the offspring of some slave, and by mistake hung on her breast. The danger that threatened my life too plainly shews me what thou art : yes, I repeat it, I no longer know thee for my father ; or if indeed thou art so, thou must be the weakest and most cowardly of men, since having almost run thy destined course, thou hadst neither tenderness nor fortitude enough to die for a son, and didst not blush to let a stranger perform that duty. Yes, that stranger only has a right to be considered as my real parent. To thee it would have been glorious to save a child : and what wouldst thou have sacrificed, but a few years embittered with age and infirmity ? By this poor sacrifice thou wouldst have purchased many long and happy years for her and for thy son, and he would not have groaned under miseries unutterable. Thou hast already enjoyed a happy destiny : seated in early youth upon the throne, in me thou hast had a lawful heir, who freed thee from the fears of seeing thy dominions become the prey of greedy strangers. Nor canst thou say, that in revenge of the contempt thy age endured from me, thou gavest me to the tomb; what tenderness, what duty, what respect have I not ever paid thee ? But now provide thee other heirs, if it be possible, who may support thy feeble age, and perform thy funeral rites. As for me, I hold myself discharged from this last duty: look on me as dead ; it is not to thy tenderness I owe my life ; life was the gift of another benefactor ; to this new parent my tenderness, my duty, all is due. How insincere are old men's prayers for death ! they murmur at their long protracted date ; but when death comes, then they want fortitude to die, and age seems no longer a burden insupportable.

CHORUS.

C H O R U S.

This is too much, prince ; thou art already miserable enough, without adding to thy misfortunes the rage of an offended father.

P H E R E S.

To whom dost thou direct this haughty language, son ? Dost thou imagine thou art talking to some Lydian slave ? Hast thou forgot, that I am born free, at least, and a Thessalian ? Yet hast thou dared to offer me the most inhuman outrage, and to treat me like the basest of mankind : but never shall it be said, that a young man insulted his father with impunity. I have given thee birth ; I have educated thee, to be the support of my throne : but know, that I am not therefore bound to sacrifice my life for thee. When did the laws of nature, or of Greece, impose on fathers the necessity of dying for their children ? All here below live for themselves, happy or miserable it matters not. I have performed my obligations to thee ; I owe thee nothing now. I have made thee a king ; and at my death I leave thee those large dominions which I received from my forefathers. What injury, then, dost thou complain of ? Wherein am I guilty ? I did not die for thee, is that my crime ? Well, do I require thee to die for me ? If life be dear to thee, think'st thou it is not dear likewise to me ? I know that our abode in Pluto's dreary kingdom will be long, and that this life is bounded by narrow limits : but, short as it is, I am willing to enjoy its blessings. These sentiments, no doubt, will not be approved by thee. Thou accusest me of cowardice ; and yet, coward as thou art thyself, thou wert not ashamed to prolong thy days beyond the stated term, by sacrificing thy wife. Inferior to a woman in generosity and fortitude, she was obliged to spare thy weakness the horrors of approaching death. What a happy stratagem, still to elude the fatal stroke, to persuade a wife that it is her duty to die for her husband ! After this, it becomes thee well, indeed, to call those persons base and cowardly who refuse to do for thee what thou hast not courage to do for thyself. Take my counsel ; be silent ; judge by thine own heart of others. Thou art fond of life ; take it for granted, that others love it as well as thee. And now be assured, if thou repeatest thy injurious reproaches, thou shalt hear more painful truths than these.

C H O R U S.

This is too much on both sides. Cease, reverend Pheres, to wound thy son with these reproaches.

A D M E T U S., *to Pheres.*

Speak, I have said all; but if the truth seems harsh to thee, thou oughtest not to have incurred it by such a crime.

P H E R E S.

The crime would have been much greater if I had devoted myself to death for thee.

A D M E T U S.

Is there no difference, then, in thy opinion, between dying in the bloom of youth, or burdened with old age?

P H E R E S.

No mortal, whether young or old, has two lives, which he can dispose of as he pleases.

A D M E T U S.

Well, may'st thou live longer than Jupiter!

P H E R E S.

How! Darest thou load a guiltless father with horrible imprecations!

A D M E T U S.

No; I on the contrary subscribe to thy own wishes. Do'st thou not desire a long train of years?

P H E R E S.

This is thy wish rather, and this corps too plainly proves it.

A D M E T U S.

This corps proclaims thy baseness.

P H E R E S.

At least, it cannot proclaim that I sacrificed this victim for myself.

A D M E T U S.

Ah, that thou in thy turn needed the sacrifice of a son's life to save thee.

P H E R E S.

Do thou act wiser, and take one wife after another to multiply thy years.

A D M E T U S.

To thy shame, thy infamy, be it remembered, that a wife did what thou oughtest to have done.

PHERES.

P H E R E S.

Thou and I think alike, that life is sweet, and death dreadful.

A D M E T U S.

These sentiments are unworthy of old age.

P H E R E S.

It seems then, that to merit thy approbation, I must give thee
the barbarous pleasure of carrying me to the tomb.

A D M E T U S.

Yet thither thou must go ; but without fame or honour.

P H E R E S.

Of what advantage to my ashes is this fancied honour ?

A D M E T U S.

Alas ! old age has banished shame.

P H E R E S.

Old age is wise, but folly is the portion of inconsiderate youth,
witness Alcestis' sacrifice.

A D M E T U S.

Retire, and leave me at liberty to finish her funeral rites.

P H E R E S.

It is just, indeed, that he whose victim she was should pay her
the last duties---I leave thee, then ; farewell : but, mark me, son,
this sacrifice will be revenged ; and Acastus, Alcestis' brother, will
be the most contemptible of mankind, if he doth not revenge on
thee the death of a loved sister.

A D M E T U S.

Go, thou and thy unworthy wife, and wear 'away a miserable
old age, childless, even though I live. This punishment thy base
desertion of me merits : from this moment I will have nothing in
common with thee, not even a dwelling. Oh that I could with
decency prohibit thy entrance into this palace, I would do it pu-
blicly, and without a blush !

But now, my friends, since we must complete our misery, let us
carry these dear remains of my Alcestis to the funeral pile.

C H O R U S.

Take with thee our tears and sighs, our everlasting sorrow, for
O 2 thy

thy loss. Oh best and fairest of women, may the infernal Deities, Mercury and Pluto, receive thee favourably ! and if indeed there are in the other world rewards and blessings reserved for the just, may'st thou enjoy them all, and in the palace of Proserpine reap the fruits of such exalted virtue.

[*The body of Alcestis is carried off the stage, Admetus and the Chorus follow it.*]



A C T the F O U R T H.

S C E N E the F I R S T.

An OFFICER of the palace.

The palace of Admetus has indeed received a great number of guests from different countries, and the care of their entertainment has always been confided to me ; but one more unfeeling than the stranger whom I have been ordered to attend to-day never entered these hospitable gates. The wretch beheld my sovereign in tears, yet scrupled not to become his guest : he knows the affliction we labour under, and, instead of behaving with decency and moderation at table, he indulges his luxurious appetite with excess. Nay more, he takes in his hand a cup wreathed with ivy, and pours whole streams of wine upon the floor ; he drinks long draughts. May the raging flame of Bacchus surround and choke him. He crowns his head with myrtle, and makes the palace resound with his songs. Ah, what unseasonable mirth ! He sings on one side of the palace, without troubling himself about the wretched Admetus, and we on the other lament the sad fate of our queen. Doubly unhappy ! since we are forced to restrain our grief, and devour our tears in the presence of this stranger : for such were the commands of Admetus. Wretch that I am, I am obliged to share the feast of a guest, who is surely some miserable robber, while my queen is carried out of the palace, never more to enter it again ; and I am deprived

of the melancholly consolation of taking my last leave of her, of presenting my hand* to her, who was to me, and to every one here, rather a mother than a sovereign. Alas ! how often has she saved us from punishment, when with gentle arts she softened the rage of our offended king ! Ah ! how can we think of this, and not detest this stranger, for his unseasonable visit !

S C E N E the S E C O N D.

The OFFICER, HERCULES,

H E R C U L E S.

Come hither, friend, and tell me what is the meaning of these frowns, this cold and forbidding air, which thou assumest ? Art thou ignorant, that a stranger, instead of beholding sadness and disgust in the countenances of those who have the care of his entertainment, should be received with cheerful smiles, and assiduity ; yet thou, at the sight of thy king's most valued friend, arnest thy looks with gloomy sorrow, and wholly intent upon a misfortune in which thou art not concerned, behavest as if I was an enemy. Draw near, then, and learn of me a wiser conduct. Dost thou know the nature and condition of human life ? Alas, no ; in a situation like thine, how shouldst thou have acquired this knowledge ? Listen to my words then. All mortals are to death devoted, nor is there one who knows to-day whether he shall see again the light to-morrow. Such is our destiny. The period of our life is so uncertain, that no art, no science, can point it out to us exactly. And now, since thou art instructed in this great principle, resign thyself to joy ; taste the delights of wine, and share the social feast. Remember, that the present moment only is thine own, and all the rest are fortune's. As for the cause of thy sorrow, banish all remembrance of it ; and if my counsels seem

* This was an ancient custom. They presented their hands to the deceased, in sign of their grief for so sad a separation. As Alcestis, for example, in the fourth scene of the first act : *She called them all by their names ; (her slaves) she presented her hand to them, &c.*

wise to thee (as I am well persuaded they are) gather the fruits of them. Resume thy spirits, then, and from this moment delivered from the burden of thy grief, drink with me, crown thy head with flowers, and be assured, that amidst the tempest which now agitates thy heart, the pleasing clashing of drinking-cups, crowned with the gifts of Bacchus, will bring thee safely into port. As we are mortals *, we ought to form such notions as best suit our mortal state: for whoever abandons himself to sorrow cannot be said to live, but to languish in real misery.

O F F I C E R.

All this I know; but the subject that at present employs my thoughts agrees but ill with pleasures and the joys of wine.

H E R C U L E S.

The person whose death thou regretest is a stranger. Why then this excess of grief? Are not the owners of this palace alive and well?

O F F I C E R.

Alive! Oh Heaven! Art thou ignorant, then, of our misfortune?

H E R C U L E S.

Not, if Admetus has spoke truly.

O F F I C E R.

Alas, unhappy prince! he does too much for strangers.

H E R C U L E S.

No, he does only what he ought, by paying the last duties to the deceased, although a stranger.

O F F I C E R.

A stranger! Ah, the person we lament was but too near to us.

H E R C U L E S.

How! has he suffered, then, any domestic loss, which he conceals from me?

O F F I C E R.

It is enough; I am silent. Go, and deliver thyself up to joy; it is for us to deplore the misfortunes of our sovereign.

* A pernicious moral this, and worthy here was not because it was approved, but the sect of Epicurians. Its being inserted that Euripides might not be disengaged.

H E R-

H E R C U L E S.

Oh Gods! these words denote a domestic mourning.

O F F I C E R.

Were it not so, should I have appeared thus opprest with grief in my attendance at thy feast?

H E R C U L E S:

Ah, my friend has injured me by this reserve; I cannot pardon him for it.

O F F I C E R.

Alas, did not these funeral garments, this hair cut off, inform thee, that thou hadst surprised us at a most unhappy time?

H E R C U L E S.

Say then, which of the family of Admetus is dead? His father, or one of his children?

O F F I C E R.

Since thou wilt oblige me to declare it, know, then, that it is his wife.

H E R C U L E S.

His wife! oh Heaven! And how in this melancholly situation couldst thou have the least regard to hospitality?

O F F I C E R.

Admetus would not violate its sacred laws in the person of such a friend as thee.

H E R C U L E S.

Oh, my unhappy friend, what a treasure hast thou lost!

O F F I C E R.

We all perish with her.

H E R C U L E S.

Alas, I suspected this by his dejected air, his mourning, his tears, which he endeavoured to restrain; but he removed my suspicions by his ambiguous answers. He insinuated, that he was performing the funeral rites of a stranger, and, contrary to my inclination, forced me to enter his palace. And here have I, wretch that I am, given a loose to festal joy, and crowned my head with flowers, in the house of a friend oppressed with grief: but it

is

is thou who wert the cause of this. Why didst thou not reveal the fatal secret to me? Where is the tomb? Speak, what road must I take to lead me to it?

O F F I C E R.

The road to Larissa. As soon as thou art out of the suburbs, thou wilt immediately see the tomb.

H E R C U L E S.

Enough. Farewel.

S C E N E the T H I R D.

H E R C U L E S *alone.*

It is now, Hercules, that thou must shew to the whole universe what a son Alcmena has given to the sovereign of the Gods. Thou hast accomplished many hard and dangerous tasks, and gratitude to Admetus now exacts one of thy valour. Alcestis must be forced out of the arms of death, and restored to her husband. Let us go, then, in search of this haughty king of shadows. Doubtless he will be near the tomb, adorned in his funeral vestments, satiating himself with the blood of victims. Let us then lie concealed near the tomb, and when he least expects such an assault, let us suddenly fall upon him. If I am so fortunate as to come upon him by surprize, and seize him in these arms, not all his struggling shall free him from the potent gripe, till he has released Alcestis. But what if this scheme fails? what if the relentless power should not come to the tomb, to taste the funeral cake sprinkled with blood? Why, then, I will seek him even in hell: I will descend alive to the gloomy palace of Proserpine and Pluto: I will demand Alcestis; secure that my request will be granted by the sovereigns of the shades, I will bring her back to earth, and restore her to her faithful husband. What do I not owe to such a friend, who, though labouring under so severe a stroke of fate, concealed the anguish of his heart, received me as a welcome guest, and paid me all the dues of friendship. Is there in Thessaly, or in all Greece, a more noble, a more generous friend than my Admetus, or one who more religiously observes the sacred laws of hospitality? No, it never shall be said, that such a benefit was repaid with ingratitude, or that Admetus was more generous than Hercules.

S C E N E

S C E N E the F O U R T H.

ADMETUS and the CHORUS returning from the funeral.

A D M E T U S.

Oh palace, where I shall no more behold Alcestis, how can I view thee, how return without her! fatal return to me! Alas! to what part of it shall I retire? where shall I stop, what shall I say, or do, now she is gone?---Oh, who will end this miserable life? Alas, I was born to be an example to the universe of wretchedness unequalled. How happy are the dead! how do I envy the destiny of those who inhabit the peaceful tomb! Oh, thou dark mansion, my afflicted heart would fain repose itself in thee! thou wilt for the future be the only object of my ardent prayers. The light of day grows insupportable. Oh, I am weary with struggling here with human weaknesses. Death, relentless death, what a loved hostage hast thou delivered for me to the king of hell!

C H O R U S.

Retire, prince, retire; conceal thy sorrows in the obscurity of the palace.

A D M E T U S.

Oh!

C H O R U S.

Thou groanest: alas! thou hast too just cause to groan.

A D M E T U S.

Oh!

C H O R U S.

Alas, too well we know the excess of thy affliction.

A D M E T U S.

Oh!

C H O R U S.

These tears, these cries, this anguish, will not recal Alcestis from the tomb.

A D M E T U S.

Oh Heaven! Oh miserable Admetus!

C H O R U S.

Doubtless, 'tis hard to lose one so tenderly beloved; but how could it be avoided?

VOL. II.

P

A D M E-

ADMETUS.

Ah, you but irritate the deadly wound that festers at my heart. What stroke could fate have given more cruel to a happy husband, than to lose a tender and beloved wife! Oh, that without entering into this soft engagement, I could have lived with her like a brother in this palace! Those only are blest for whom Hymen never lighted the nuptial torch, who know not marriage, and the thousand woes attending it. Alas, I weep the loss of a loved wife; and to complete my wretchedness, I must behold my children miserable likewise in the loss of their mother. Oh, spectacle insupportable to a father and a husband! Alas, it was once in my choice to have been neither.

CHORUS.

It is true, inevitable destiny has struck this blow.

ADMETUS.

Oh!

CHORUS.

But will thy sorrows know no period?

ADMETUS.

Oh!

CHORUS.

It is dreadful, yet---

ADMETUS.

Oh!

CHORUS.

Thou must endeavour to support this loss with fortitude. Thou art not the first---

ADMETUS.

Wretched Admetus!

CHORUS.

Thou art not the first prince who hath lost the object of his tenderness. Fortune afflicts us differently, but none are spared.

ADMETUS.

Oh, tenderness for ever buried in the tomb! Oh grief eternal! endless wailing! ---* Cruel as you are, why did you give me your

* To the Chorus,

unwel-

unwelcome succours to rob me of the pleasure of interring myself alive with my Alcestis? But for you, I should now have been with her; with her, the dearest, and the best of wives. I should have passed the infernal waves with her, and Pluto would have had two victims: Pluto, relentless as he is, would not have divided two hearts by love so closely and so tenderly united.

C H O R U S.

Yet hear us, prince, hear an example of equal woe. A man to whom we were related had a son, the only hope of his family: This unhappy son was taken from him by death. He deserved to be lamented: the loss was irreparable, and the father in extreme old age; yet he bore this misfortune patiently, and refused not to be comforted.

A D M E T U S.

Oh that palace! that nuptial apartment! how can I return there! my fortune is changed, and they are changed to me. Oh Gods, what a cruel difference between my present state and my past happiness! Ah, my memory brings back the time when I entered that delightful abode, leading my lovely Alcestis amidst the joyful acclamations of my subjects, and the sound of various instruments, preceded by the blaze of tapers*, and followed by a crowd of guests, who sung glad hymns in honour of the happy day. In these charming concerts, the names of lover, of husband, and of bride, were a thousand times repeated. They extolled the happiness of her whom I now lament; they extolled my happiness. Blest and illustrious pair, they cried--Ah, funeral cries succeed these songs of joy. Long sable veils have taken the place of those white vestments with which the God of marriage then adorned me; and now, instead of hymeneal pomp, grief, tears, and despair, attend me to that melancholy palace where my Alcestis is seen no more.

C H O R U S.

It is true, prince, miseries which till now thou never knewest succeed thy former happiness; so Fate decrees: but still thou livest, Alcestis dies, and leaves thee all her tenderness. Such is the usual train of human events. How many husbands are there whom inexorable death has reduced like thee to loneliness and grief?

* In the Greek, *made of wood cut upon Mount Pelion*. This was a wood which had a great quantity of rosin in it.

A D M E T U S.

Ah, my dear friends, Alcestis' fate is happier far than mine: eternal fame waits on her shade, sorrow can never reach her more; she is now free from all those miseries which are planted round us. While the unfortunate Admetus, forced to survive, will drag a life more insupportable than death itself. I feel already the burden is too painful---Ah, how shall I support the sight of these sad walls! Alcestis is not there, to make my entrance pleasing; I cannot speak to her; I cannot hear her voice. On which side shall I turn my restless eyes? Alas, they every where will meet a frightful solitude---Ah, what torture to a fond lover, to see around me those couches, those seats, where once I saw her, and where I never more shall see her! This funeral pomp, that obscure apartment, the mournful appearance of my palace, all will incessantly bring back her dear idea. But what will be my anguish, when my poor children, drowned in their tears, shall hang upon my knees, and conjure me to restore their mother to them; when I shall hear the groans and ceaseless lamentations of the slaves! Oh, ye Gods, will they often cry, of what a sovereign hast thou deprived us! These, these are the torments this palace has prepared for me. Shall I quit it to be present at Thessalian nuptials? Ah, those smiling assemblies of youthful brides and bridegrooms, will be to me a source of the most poignant grief. How shall I be able to behold that fair circle of my Alcestis' loved companions! This sight will redouble my grief and my despair. Oh, what will not the malice of my enemies invent! Methinks I already hear them say to each other, " See that inglorious prince, that unworthy hui-
" band, is he not ashamed to live? He who feared death so much,
" that to avoid it he sacrificed his wife. After this base action,
" let him boast a noble mind. His parents are odious to him, be-
" cause they refused to die for him, and he had not courage to die
" himself." Ah Gods! this is the last stroke that you reserve for me-----How then, my friends, how can I wish to live, de-
prived of honour, deprived of my Alcestis!

SCENE

S C E N E the F O U R T H.

Or the I N T E R L U D E.

The C H O R U S, A D M E T U S *absorbed in grief.*

The C H O R U S.

Above the vulgar raised, often have I consulted the learned STROPHE I.
sisters. I have examined their profound mysteries ; and for the
fruits of this vain study, I have found that nothing is more
powerful than destiny. Vainly would we seek in the Thracian
writings, dictated by the soul-moving Orpheus, a preservative
against the strokes of fate. Vainly would we seek it in those re-
medies for the various ills of human kind which Phœbus left to
the disciples of Esculapius.

Destiny is a severe divinity, to whose temple there is no access. ANTISTRO-
PHE I.
He is not to be moved by prayers, nor by the blood of victims.
Ah cruel, ah inexorable God ! be not more harsh to me than thou
haſt hitherto been. It is by thee, that the sovereign of the Gods
executes his immutable degrees. Resiſtless in thy force*, iron
itſelf yields to thy ſtoke. Thy heart is always shut to tender-
neſs and pity.

It is this terrible divinity, oh Admetus, who has ſeized thee STROPHE II.
in his powerful hands : yet lose not thy fortitude in the painful
conflict ; for all thy cries and tears will not bring back to earth
the inhabitants of the shades. Even the offspring of the Gods are
ſubject to the ſtoke of death. She whom thou lamentest was
dear, and ever will be dear to us. A woman of ſuch exalted vir-
tue is even more respectable than the offspring of the Gods.

Ah, think not that Alceſtis' tomb ſhall be undiſtinguiſhed from ANTISTRO-
PHE II.
the vulgar dead. Travellers ſhall pay divine honours to her shade,
they ſhall turn aside from their road, and with awful reverence view
her tomb. " This, ſhall they ſay, this was the generous, the
" faithful wife, who for her husband devoted herſelf to death.
" She is now a Goddess. Oh, amiable Divinity, be favourable to
" us---" Ha ! the ſon of Alcmena, he advances towards thee,
prince.

* In the Greek, *Which is brought from the Chalybes, a people of Pontus.*

A C T the F I F T H.

In one S C E N E.

H E R C U L E S, a WOMAN veiled, the **C H O R U S**,
A D M E T U S, **T R A I N**.

H E R C U L E S.

Admetus, thou art not ignorant what the laws of friendship require of a friend in affliction: he, instead of concealing his sorrows, ought to share them with a faithful friend. Hercules, who came hither at a time of mourning, merited at least thy confidence; but thou didst not judge him worthy of it. Not satisfied with concealing from him the death of thy wife, thou hast constrained me to accept thy offers, and, in spite of my reluctance, led me into thy palace, as if the person who lay dead in it had been a stranger, and not of consequence enough to prevent thy receiving a guest. Mean time, I crowned my head with myrtle; I poured the accustomed libations; I resigned myself to mirth and pleasure in a house of mourning. Thou must acknowledge, prince, that I have reason to complain of thee. I will not, however, increase thy affliction by reproaches, but acquaint thee with the real cause of my returning hither.

Thou seest this woman, prince; I come to confide her to thy care; and from thy friendship I expect that thou wilt keep her in thy palace, till after having subdued the king of the Bistonians, and taken possession of his steeds, I return in triumph to thee. If I should perish in this dangerous enterprize (but may the Gods avert the omen, and grant me an happy return) I yield her to thee. She is a conquest which has cost me some labour. Happening to be at certain games, where very considerable prizes (as thou may'st judge by that I am possessed of) were proposed to the combatants, I entered the lists. Several noble steeds were to be the prize of the meaner combats; but for those of wrestling and the chariot-race, great numbers were decreed. And besides these rich prizes, this woman also was to be bestowed upon the conqueror. I saw her: a prize of such importance was not to be neglected. And now, prince, I again repeat my request, that thou wilt take care of her, and receive her from my hand as a precious conquest, not of a ravisher but of a champion crowned.

A D M E T U S.

It was not through any unjust contempt for a friend, that I con-

concealed from thee, great Hercules, the death of my wife, but only because it would have increased my affliction, to see another person rob me of the glory of receiving thee as a guest. I was already too miserable in the loss of my Alcestis, without suffering this new misfortune. But oh, Hercules, I conjure thee, urge thy request with regard to this woman no farther. Leave this pledge with a friend less miserable than Admetus: Pheræ will afford thee many. Oh, by the Gods, I implore thee, do not reduce me to the cruel necessity of incessantly recalling to remembrance the irreparable loss I have sustained. How should I be able to restrain my tears, having this fair one continually in my view. Ah, I am wretched enough already! I need not this aggravation of my woes. Where, oh my friend, where shall I bring up without danger this young beauty, (for such she appears to be by her air and dress). Can she dwell with decency amongst a number of turbulent young men? Thou knowest how difficult it is to restrain the fiery passions of youth. It is the interest of my friend that obliges me to speak thus freely. Wouldst thou have me keep her retired in the apartment of that dear one whom I lament? Ah, how can I offer her my Alcestis' bed? Have I not reason to fear the censures of my subjects, some of whom will not fail to say, that I have betrayed my benefactress, and given my heart to another. Might not the loved shade of her who died for me, justly reproach me for my infidelity? For oh, my friend, I acknowledge it, Alcestis only merits all my love and veneration. In this miserable state to which I am reduced, is not reserve and caution necessary? * But thou, lady, whoever thou art, the more I look upon thee, the more I consider thy person, thy air, thy gait, the greater resemblance thou seemest to bear to my beloved Alcestis--Oh Hercules, I conjure thee by the Gods, take from my eyes an object which affects me thus. Spare, oh spare my bleeding heart this trial. Alas! the more I look upon her the more I am persuaded it is Alcestis whom I view. My soul is strangely moved; tears in spite of me stream from my eyes--Alas, wretched as I am, it is now that I feel all the horror of my fate.

C H O R U S.

It must be acknowledged, that thy fate is very unhappy: but mortals ought to receive with fortitude whatever comes from the hand of heaven.

* Here he turns his eyes upon this woman, whom he had before but slightly viewed.

H E R.

A L C E S T I S.

H E R C U L E S.

Oh, that the father of Gods and men would communicate to me his power, soon would my grateful hand deliver Alcestis from the shades !

A D M E T U S.

Yes, thou would'st restore her to me ; I know thou would'st. But why should we form these fruitless wishes ? Such power is not to be attained by mortals. Ah, those who have once passed those dismal shores never revisit earth again.

H E R C U L E S.

Do not, then, carry thy grief to excess ; and learn to bear with patience inevitable misfortunes

A D M E T U S.

Alas, it is easier to recommend patience to the afflicted than to bear affliction.

H E R C U L E S.

But of what use are these ceaseless tears and sighs ?

A D M E T U S.

Of none ; but my tenderness for my Alcestis is superior to reason.

H E R C U L E S.

Tenderness for the dead produces nothing but tears.

A D M E T U S.

How is it possible not to mourn for the irreparable loss I have suffered ? no words can describe it.

H E R C U L E S.

Thou hast lost an amiable wife : this must be acknowledged.

A D M E T U S.

So perfect, that I cannot live since I am deprived of her.

H E R C U L E S.

Thy wound is still recent : time will heal it.

A D M E T U S.

Yes, time will heal it ; if by time thou meanest the period of my days.

H E R C U L E S.

Another bride will---

A D M E T U S.

Oh hold, Hercules, what words have escaped thee ! Alas, could I have believed that a friend---

H E R C U L E S.

What, always faithful to thy sorrow for Alcestis' loss, will thy heart be---

A D M E T U S.

So insensible to the power of love, that there is not a woman in the world who could hope to succeed my Alcestis.

H E R C U L E S.

But dost thou imagine, that Alcestis' ashes are affected by this excess of constancy ?

A D M E T U S.

I know not that ; but I owe them this respect.

H E R C U L E S.

I applaud thy sentiments : but I cannot help condemning thy conduct.

A D M E T U S.

Whether thou condemnest or blamest me, yet this thou may'st be assured of, that I will never again resume the name of husband.

H E R C U L E S.

I must repeat it, I admire these generous sentiments : they are the effect of an excessive tenderness for Alcestis.

A D M E T U S.

Dead as she is, for ever lost to me, yet would I rather die a thousand deaths, than violate the faith I have vowed to her.

H E R C U L E S.

But, at least, thou may'st receive this fair one in thy house : I beg it of thee, friend ; her birth merits this instance of respect.

A D M E T U S.

Oh, Hercules, I conjure thee by thy immortal father, urge not this request.

H E R C U L E S.

Thou knowest not thy real interest, if thou refusest to grant it.

A L C E S T I S.

ADMETUS.

If I comply, I plunge a dagger in my own breast.

HERCULES.

Take my counsel; thou wilt one day thank me for it.

ADMETUS

Alas, thou forcest me to detest thy victory.

HERCULES.

And yet it is thine as well as mine.

ADMETUS.

So I would have it: but let this woman then retire.

HERCULES.

Alas, Admetus, she shall, if thou dost insist upon it; but I beseech thee, consider what thou dost.

ADMETUS.

I cannot alter my resolution, unless thou threaten'st me with the loss of thy friendship.

HERCULES.

Assure thyself, that I have good reasons for pressing thee upon this subject.

ADMETUS.

Well, since it must be so, thou shalt be obeyed; but yet I do not yield. I am constrained to satisfy thee.

HERCULES.

The time will come when thou wilt thank me for it: only gratify my wishes now.

ADMETUS.

Well, since thou wilt have it so, some of you lead her into the palace. [To his attendants.]

HERCULES.

No, it is not to them that I will confide a person of her rank.

ADMETUS.

Condescend then, I intreat thee, to conduct her thither thyself.

HERCULES.

H E R C U L E S.

No, Admetus, this office belongs to thee ; offer her thy hand then.

A D M E T U S.

How, I ! must I do this ? Ah no, Hercules; my palace is open to her, but spare this ceremony.

H E R C U L E S.

Admetus, it is to thy care I trust her ; therefore I insist upon thy leading her into the palace.

A D M E T U S.

Ah, what is it thou obligest me to do ?

H E R C U L E S.

Obey, Admetus, and pay this stranger the accustomed honours.

A D M E T U S.

I will then, since I cannot avoid it : but oh, Hercules, all women but Alcestis are Medusas to my eyes.

H E R C U L E S.

Wilt thou obey me ?

A D M E T U S.

I will.

H E R C U L E S.

It is well; keep her then as thy wife. Thou shalt find that the son of Jupiter knows how to be grateful. [He lifts up her veil.] Behold Alcestis, and dismiss thy griefs for ever.

A D M E T U S.

Oh Gods, what do I see ! Oh, amazing prodigy ! Is it then Alcestis whom I behold ? or is it not an illusion raised by some malevolent Deity, to fill me with deceitful joy ?

H E R C U L E S.

No, Admetus, no ; it is Alcestis, it is thy wife whom thou beholdest.

A D M E T U S.

Ah, is it not a shade come from death's dark regions ?

H E R C U L E S.

Admetus, I would not deceive thee.

A D M E T U S.

Can it be possible ! that I behold my Alcestis, my wife, she to whom a few moments ago I paid the last sad honours !

H E R C U L E S.

It is Alcestis : doubt no more. I am not surprised that thy happiness should appear incredible to thee.

A D M E T U S.

Oh, it is not a shade ; it is Alcestis whom I touch. Then I may speak to her, friend, if she really lives.

H E R C U L E S.

She lives. Speak to her.

A D M E T U S.

Oh, thou dear object of my tenderest wishes ! Oh, my Alcestis, have I recovered thee, at the time I never hoped to see thee more !

H E R C U L E S.

It is certain, that thou now possessest her ; thou art not deceived by any envious deity.

A D M E T U S.

Oh illustrious son of Jupiter, may thy felicity equal my ardent wishes ! Oh, may the great deity who gave thee life, preserve it to thee long ! To thee I owe the inestimable blessing of having my Alcestis restored to me. But, tell me, friend, how thou attempted'st to bring back 'Alcestis from the shades, and in what manner thou didst succeed ?

H E R C U L E S.

It has cost me a combat with the tyrant of the dead..

A D M E T U S.

Where didst thou meet the unrelenting king ?

H E R C U L E S.

At the tomb, where I concealed myself ; and suddenly springing on him, seized him in my arms.

A D M E T U S.

But why is Alcestis motionless and dumb ?

H E R C U L E S.

Having been devoted to the infernal deities, she must be purified ;

fied ; nor canst thou enjoy her conversation till the third rising morn. Go, prince, lead Alcestis into thy palace, and still continue, as thou hast hitherto been, a most religious observer of the laws of hospitality. Farewel ; I go to accomplish the commands of the Son of Stenelus.

ADMETUS.

Ah, Hercules, deprive me not of thy presence so soon, and deign to make this palace thy abode for some time longer.

HERCULES.

On another occasion I will, but now time presses. Adieu, Admetus.

ADMETUS.

Adieu, most generous Hercules. Oh, may success in this new enterprize restore thee soon to my wishes !---Hear me, my people, and ye governors, hear the orders of your king : It is my will, that there be a general rejoicing for the unexpected blessings this day has given me ; let feasts be celebrated ; let the altars stream with the blood of victims, and lead up public dances, in honour of the Gods. Thus blest above my former happiness, it is just that I should express my gratitude to Heaven.

CHORUS.

By what extraordinary means do the Gods accomplish their designs ! It is by their secret power, that the great events which they decree seem to unfold themselves contrary to the expectation of wondering mortals. Such is the prodigy we have seen to-day, the subject of our astonishment and joy.

O B S E R V A T I O N S

U P O N T H E

T R A G E D Y O F A L C E S T I S.

WE may reduce to three or four heads all that raises dislike in the play of Alcestis : these we must endeavour to examine to the bottom ; for as to the general air of plainness diffused through all this piece, as well as through several others, and through Homer himself, we shall pass this over in silence. The Greek simplicity had not yet attained that elevation of thought which is supplied by the magnificence of Rome or France. Rome, with all her haughtiness, could hardly attain the nice and natural taste of Athens : and the ancient Greek structure, with all the simplicity of the first ages, is still far preferable to the splendor and dignity of the Roman ones. The Athenian ideas were raised as high as members of a common-wealth could be supposed to raise them : they painted the nature of those times in its true form. We will therefore not mention as faulty the coarseness that may be found in the persons of Euripides. We might as well charge the same fault upon the masterly portraits of Vandyke. We may say with truth, that by labouring to dignify nature, we have taken from her that bloom which made all her ornament in the golden age : this bloom, which can scarcely be express, resembles that of fruits ; and as fruits newly gathered in their maturity have something more pleasing than when their taste is heightened by art, to please appetites too delicate, so nature, new from the hand of its author, and copied in its first state, has infinitely more grace than when we lay on paint to make it fine. In its first state, it is like the treat of Philemon and Baucis. Corrupted in its second, it is the banquet of Trimalcion ; or of the pampered Romans of Horace and Juvenal.

We will not insist upon another thing, which is the consequence of what has been already mentioned, a little tint of familiarity which may be observed in these scenes, and which, in our eye, has more of comic airiness than tragic dignity. The Chorus

round

round the gate of the palace, to know what was passing, the conversation of the Chorus with the confidant, some scenes of Hercules, particularly his conversation with the officer, that is, with the slave, who was employed to feast him, have made some critics imagine, that this piece was a tragico-comedy; a wildness of design unknown to the ancients, as others have well observed. This piece is of the same cast with other ancient tragedies, and painted in the same manner. A desire of exhibiting to the spectators nature as it really is, though somewhat embellished, has now and then led the ancients to an easy manner, which we are pleased to call comic; because we judge of their tragedies by our own. The transition from simplicity to negligence, and from easy to comic language, being imperceptible and short, it is no wonder, that by a false prepossession, one is often taken for the other; particularly in an age where we value ourselves upon judging of every thing without appeal. Thus the same answer will serve here as to the former objection. Tragedy, considered as it is in itself, has nothing in itself contrary to the natural representations of manners, times, and places. It would be easy to produce more than one instance of our best poets, where, by the help of a slight perversion of the imagination, an affected motion, or tone of voice, that which is natural or beautiful would be changed to parody and burlesque. Let us come, then, to essential and critical points.

And first. The whole city of Pheræ knew that Alcestis had devoted herself to save her husband: even Hercules, who was not there, knew it; and was doubtless informed of it before his arrival. For he looked upon the death of Alcestis to be far off (Act the Fourth, Scene the Second.) It had been long therefore a public report. Every one knew that Alcestis was to die for her husband; but the determined day was not known. Admetus therefore could not certainly be ignorant of this voluntary sacrifice. Well, but ought he not to have opposed it? I answer, that it was not in his power to prevent it: and this is evident from these two circumstances. For first; being saved by Apollo, who had deceived the Destinies (Act the first, Scene the first) he was not at liberty to die; and hence it happened, that he was forced to seek another victim, in obedience to the God, whose kind office became fatal to him; for his relations refused the condition. There remained only Alcestis: she devoted herself; the Destinies accepted her; and there was no longer a possibility of recanting. What could Admetus do? Life was forced upon him; and this he shews suf-

sufficiently in the beginning of that fine scene where Alcestis takes leave of him and her children (Act the second, Scene the first, &c.) Admetus therefore has no other resource but his tears, his prayers, and his grief, and to these he abandons himself. But why it will be asked, did not the poet in his prologue prevent this objection, by more fully explaining the subject? He in reality says enough for the Greeks, who knew the fable, and who understood him by half a word: enough even for those who will condescend to be attentive to it, but too little for posterity, which has lost the traces of fabulous antiquity, and which is too ready to condemn whatever is with difficulty reconciled to present usages and ideas. The words of Apollo, (Act the first, Scene the first) those of death (Act the first, Scene the second) and the grief of Admetus, who complains that he cannot die with his wife, is doubtless sufficient for persons who have not resolved to condemn Euripides without hearing him. Yet it must be acknowledged, that if Admetus had been ignorant of the name of his deliverer, this would have produced a fine situation, when he found that this deliverer was his wife. I have been informed, by a great princess, whose taste is equal to her illustrious birth, that Racine* had formed the plan of an Alcestis upon this circumstance, and had resolved to adopt all the beauties of Euripides, and even to improve upon them by this happy surprize.

Secondly, they also exclaim against the indecency of a son's seeming to require his parents to die in his stead. How horrible to hear him reproach them for not devoting themselves to death to save him! And, lastly, what baseness, what malice, to call it no worse, in the father's answers, who charges him likewise with selfishness and cowardice! Imputations which destroy the character the poet gives him. This passes in the sixth scene of the third act. And this is the objection in all its force.

Let us begin our defence, with laying down a rule which ought to be admitted by all persons of sense and judgment. If there are things in this scene shocking to the reason of any age whatever, so sensible and polite a people as the Greeks would not have approved them. But, if the Greeks found nothing to condemn in those passages which appear indecent and horrible to us, it follows, that they are not altogether such as we imagine them to be: in a word, their ideas in this respect were not the same as ours are

* This is supposed in the opera of Alcestis.

now : and can it be imagined, that they have not in different ages undergone as great a change in still more essential articles of morality ? * With us, if a gentleman is affronted, it is expected that he should hazard the consequences of a duel ; and, to secure his honour, he must either kill or be killed. This is little : for the maxim not being yet entirely abolished, we are not sufficiently sensible how ridiculous it will appear two thousand years hence, or with what contempt it would have been received in the time of Euripides. But in a former age, a knight would take a fancy to measure his sword with an unknown person, who expected no such challenge. This we must allow to that age : reason requires we should. It was then a point of honour, and fame was the motive. I say nothing of the custom of having seconds in duels ; another piece of extravagance, which obliged two friends who had supped together amicably, to cut each other's throats a moment afterwards, espousing a quarrel in which they were not concerned, the cause of which they were often ignorant of, and ready to join with the first comer. Let us suppose these customs represented on our theatre, to an audience composed of Athenians, or even of Frenchmen several ages hence, would there be madhouses sufficient to lodge those whom, according to their opinion, they should deem infected with the same notions ? The parallel is too striking to stop there. It is agreed, then, that manners are subject to great changes, and so likewise are the ideas of virtue. Opinion has its vicissitudes, arising from nature and education, and only the Christian religion can fix it. Did not the savages of Canada think it a pious duty to kill their fathers, when they had reached an extreme old age, to deliver them from its inconveniencies ? And have not the fathers among them demanded death from their children, as a mark of filial tenderness and obedience ? This answer, if well considered, is sufficient to make us at least suspend our judgment of the scene in question, and reconcile us to a fair examination of it. Laying prejudice aside, then, it cannot, in the first place, be said, that Admetus really intreated those who gave him being to sacrifice themselves for him. Apollo indeed says, (Act the first, Scene the first) that this prince had founded his friends and relations upon this subject ; but we must explain this term by the fable itself. Apollo had declared (and probably in the presence of Pheres, of his wife, and of Alcestis,) —

* The principles of natural law are not sometimes changed by distant consequences effaced in the hearts of men; but they are changed.

(as the manner then was) gave credit to the word of a friend, who endeavoured to persuade him that Alcestis was out of the question. In those days persons were less subtle and less penetrating than in ours, and it was common enough to believe a man upon his word. And it is certain, that this fault is productive of so many beauties, that we readily admit the poet's palliation. The errors of masters in any art, are often the effects of the art itself.

Buchanan, who has translated this play into very fine Latin verse, as one of those in which the tender and pathetic most struck him, was so little affected with these errors, that he has neither suppressed nor disguised them : for Buchanan, by long studying the ancients, had entered into their ideas ; and is it not very probable, that our readiness to condemn them proceeds from our having studied these great models much less than he did ? As for Quinault, although in his opera of Alcestis he has followed a very different plan from that of Euripides, yet he was not afraid of disgusting the present age, by preserving the character of the old man Pheres, to whom, among several speeches of the same kind, he gives the following one :

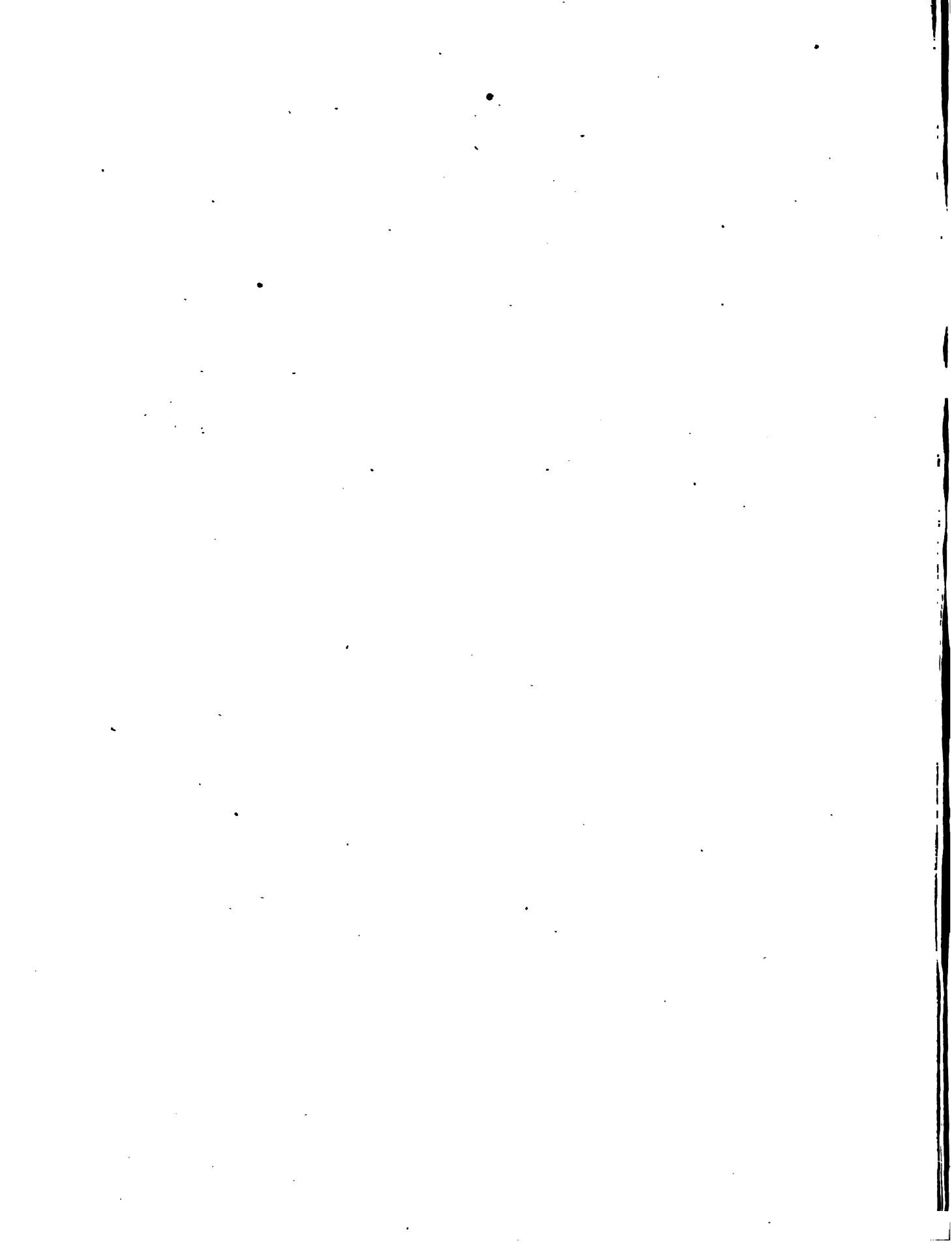
“ J'aime mon fils, je l'ai fait Roi ;
“ Pour prolonger son sort je mourrois sans effroi,
“ Si je pouvois offrir des jours dignes d'envie.
“ Je n'ai plus qu'un reste de vie :
“ Ce n'est rien pour Admete, & c'est beaucoup pour moi.

This is certainly equal to theselines of Euripides: “ * If life be dear to
“ thee, think’st thou it is not dear likewise to me ? ” I shall say nothing
of the other French Alcestis ; because I have no intention to cri-
ticise living authors : but it is greatly to be lamented, that Racine
did not execute the plan he had sketched out. We should then have
seen with what art he would have accommodated all the wonders of
the original to our manners. His Phedra and Iphigenia answer
for the success of Alcestis. However, without regretting what we
have not, let us judge what the copy would have been by the beau-
ties of the original. What gradual heightening of noble sorrow
from the opening of the play till the conclusion, and this without
any episode ! What painting in the relation made by the confidant !
What images, what natural strokes, in the speeches of Alcestis,

when she takes leave of her husband and children, and fancies she already sees Charon and the monarch of the dead dragging her to the infernal regions ! How is the pomp of the funeral, and the grief of Admetus realized ! And, lastly, can there be a situation more affecting, and better contrived, than that of Admetus and Alcestis veiled ? Certainly the pen which has produced so many striking beauties deserves that, without being prejudiced by the arguments urged by the Perraults, we should be so far just, as not to call those things absurd and ridiculous which are easier to be defended than condemned *.

* The last proof in favour of Alcestis is, that Aristophanes is silent upon those passages, at which the moderns are shocked. This poet, who let loose all the rage of criticism upon Euripides, sometimes men-

tions Alcestis ; but says not a word of what appears absurd to us, not even in his *Frogs* ; an evident sign that it was not absurd in the opinion of the Athenians.



THE
GREEK THEATRE
PART the SECOND.

THE
TRAGEDIES OF ESCHYLUS.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE following tragedies are all that remains of seventy at least composed by Eschylus; I say, at least seventy. For some have reckoned a hundred, five of which were formerly called satyric tragedies; that is, plays in which satyrs acted their parts, and which partook of the nature of comedy, without preserving scarce any thing of the dignity of tragedy. This singular kind of drama was very licentious; but the only one which is left us, is the Cyclops of Euripides: and this is sufficient to lessen our concern for the loss of the rest. It is indeed surprising, that the greatest geniuses among the Athenians should have degraded their buskin to a kind of comedy, so low and ridiculous, only to please the people. One of these dramas was always added to the three tragedies composed by each candidate for the prize of poetry, and these four pieces together were called a *Tétralogie*. It was in this manner that Eschylus contended with his contemporaries. But afterwards Sophocles opposed tragedy to tragedy, as Suidas observes; and it is very probable, that this custom was continued for the future. There was certainly something very ridiculous in thus opposing four tragedies to four, since one or two plays of an author might be superior to one or two of his competitors, and the two others might be worse: but without entering here into these debates, which I have purposely avoided, that I might only present the reader with the true manner of the ancient poets, it will be sufficient to begin with shewing that of Eschylus. Although the extracts here given from his plays are much less extensive than the analyses of the other Greek poets, yet from these extracts a just idea may be formed of his genius; and it will appear, that the Greeks did not without reason call him the father of tragedy, not only on account of that elevation and singular nobleness which distinguished his works, but because he was really the inventor of the dialogue, by introducing three interlocutors upon the stage, which had never been before.

The following plays are ranged according to the common editions; but, if we follow historical order, they ought to stand thus:

PROMETHEUS.

The SUPPLIANTS.

The SEVEN CHIEFS at the Siege of Thebes.

AGAMEMNON.

The COEPHORES.

The EUMENIDES.

The PERSIANS.

T H E
T R A G E D I E S
O F
E S C H Y L U S.



P R O M E T H E U S, in chains.

THIS is one of the three tragedies which Eschylus composed upon the history of Prometheus; namely, his theft, his chains, and his deliverance. The second only has come down to us. The subject, and all the incidents, are extravagant enough. It is the punishment of Prometheus, but different, in some respects, from that represented by the other poets.

A C T I.

Force and Violence, the children of Styx, come with Vulcan to a horrid desert of European Scythia. They point out immediately the place where the scene is laid, and the occasion of their arrival, by repeating to Vulcan Jupiter's orders to bind Prometheus to a rock, as a punishment for having stolen the celestial fire, and communicating it to mortals. Vulcan, as the God of fire, is interested in the robbery; yet can with difficulty resolve to execute this vengeance on a Deity, for such Prometheus is supposed to be. However, Jupiter must be obeyed, and Vulcan weeps, while he pronounces to the guilty son of Themis the sentence passed upon him by Jupiter. Force and Violence urge Vulcan to execute his commands; and hence arises a contest between Severity and Compassion, which would appear even to us to be in the true spirit of tragedy, if the subject was different, or if we had the key to it.

The God of fire yields to the supreme power of Jupiter, who is supposed to be lately established in his dominions. He displays the chains, which are already prepared, and binds the unfortunate Prometheus; guilty only in his too great love for mankind. He nails the irons to a rock, while the Divinities, who are looking on, urge him to neglect nothing that may prevent the criminal from escaping the vengeance of the Gods. The manner in which all this is executed is shocking. For even the neck of the unhappy victim is pierced through with diamond nails, and every circumstance of the punishment is so strongly marked, that the representation must have inspired the utmost horror. At length, the three Divinities leave him; Vulcan with expressions of commiseration, but the two others with bitter railings upon Prometheus, for his supposed crime. This whole scene is full of satirical strokes, which represent Jupiter as an usurper: for he is said to have enslaved all the Gods, and to reign over them with boundless authority.

The unhappy Deity, who had hitherto been silent, calls the ether, the winds, the fountains, the sea, the earth, and the sun, to witness, of the injustice which he, though a God, suffered from the Gods. Already he counts the many thousand years he is likely to languish upon this rock: for he seems not to know when his punishment is to have an end, and imputes this treatment to the tyranny of the new master of the universe. But suddenly he recats his spirits; and deriving fortitude from his art of foretelling future events, he yields for a time to invincible necessity. Such is the name he gives to Destiny.

In the midst of his complaints, he hears a noise, as of the flight of birds around his rock. This is occasioned by the arrival of the nymphs, the daughters of Thetis and the Ocean: they are borne upon the wings of the wind, and come to express their sorrow to Prometheus for the condition to which he is reduced by Jupiter; for they tell him, they had heard the strokes of the hammer, which resounded in the depths of their grottos. This conversation is at first made up of murmurs against the new government of heaven. They say, that Jupiter has thrown all things into confusion in the celestial court: that he is cruel, inflexible, suspicious, and tyrannical. Prometheus tastes the sweetnes of an anticipated revenge, by declaring that Jupiter will be de-throned; that this God will consult him concerning the conspiracy, but shall not prevail upon him to make the least discovery. He speaks like one transported with rage. The Chorus, which is composed of the Sea-Goddesses before mentioned, express them-

themselves with more moderation, but to the same purpose. Curiosity incites these Divinities to ask the cause of so strange a punishment. Prometheus gives them a circumstantial relation of it; and thus the audience is fully informed of the subject.

He goes back to the sedition of the Gods against Saturn, the rebellion of the Titans against Jupiter, and the consequence of these conspiracies, which was the banishment of Saturn, and the defeat of the Titans : “ For it is through my prudent counsels, says he, “ that Jupiter now reigns, and this is my reward for a sceptre which “ he owes to me.” Here Prometheus assigns the cause of this treatment. “ Jupiter, says he, by the fall of Saturn, and the de-“ fear of the Titans, becoming master of the universe, politically “ conciliated the favour of the Gods by various gifts, but shewed no “ regard to the human race, which he was desirous of destroying, “ that he might produce an entire new world. The heavenly “ court consented; but I gave him different advice : I only had “ courage enough to preserve mankind ; but my compassion for “ them could not move the tyrant, who persecutes me thus. Such “ is my crime, and such my punishment.” The Chorus seem greatly affected with these words, and Prometheus continues : “ I pre-“ vented mortals from seeing clearly into their future destiny.” By what means, say the Chorus ? “ By impressing blind hopes upon “ their minds,” answers the God. “ An inestimable blessing this !” replies the first nymph. Prometheus concludes his account of the gifts he had bestowed upon mankind by that of fire. He invites the nymphs to descend, and be witnesses of his adventures: for till now these Goddesses had hovered in the air in machines. And here the Chorus first take their place on the stage.

A C T II.

The Ocean, as uncle to Prometheus, comes to share the grief of his nephew. He appears mounted on a strange kind of winged animal ; an unaccountable extravagance this. He wisely advises Prometheus to submit to Jupiter, and not to struggle against sovereign power. He offers to act as a mediator between them, and to endeavour to appease the anger of the offended Deity. But Prometheus, from his knowledge of the implacable character of Jupiter, refuses these offers; being apprehensive, that such submissions would be prejudicial to the mediator, and useless to him. The Ocean, moved to compassion not only for Prometheus, but

for Atlas *, condemned to support the heavens, and for Typhon †, struck with thunderbolts, and crushed underneath mount Etna, continues fixed in his design to solicit their pardon. “ No, answers Prometheus, do thou, like a skilful courtier, make use of all thy endeavours to keep well with him thyself, (for the Ocean had been concerned in the quarrels of the Gods) and leave Jupiter’s resentment to be softened by time.”

The Ocean, convinced at length by the arguments of Prometheus, retires as he came, and leaves the Chorus to repeat their accustomed complaints with songs and a kind of dance. These complaints turn upon the severity of Jupiter, the fate of Prometheus, and the grief of those who compassionate his misfortunes.

A C T III.

“ It is not (says Prometheus, beginning the third act) it is not pride, which restrains me from submission; but I cannot forgive this indignity which the Gods have offered me. This new court owes every thing to me; you know it: I will not repeat the benefits I have bestowed upon it. But hear what I have done in favour of the human race. From brutes, as they were, I found the happy art to make them men. I say not this to reproach them with my gifts, but to shew you how far I have carried my affection for them. Blind to their own advantages, deaf to the voice of reason, like vain phantoms, they wandered about without order, and without laws. They sheltered themselves, like vile insects, in the hollows of caves and rocks: they were ignorant of the art of building houses for their habitations. Uncertain in their conduct, they discerned neither the change of seasons, nor the progress of time. It was I who first taught them to observe the course of the stars: it was I who instructed them in the mystery of numbers, the connexion of letters, who gave them memory, that mother of the muses. I taught them to subject beasts, not their own species, to the yoke, to tame the fiery steed, and make it subservient to their pleasures and their use. Who but myself taught them the mariner’s art? To me they owe all these advantages. Alas! the unhappy author of so many arts knows not how to deliver himself from the torments unjustly inflicted on him.”

* A mountain of Africa, one of the highest in the whole earth.

† A mountain of Sicily, famous for its emitting flames and stones.

Prometheus, after a short interruption by the Chorus, continues in this manner to relate all the favours he had lavished upon mortals. According to him, physic, with all its medicines, the talent of explaining dreams, with their prognostics, and of distinguishing presages, with their consequences, make part of his gifts. It was he, who, from the bowels of the earth, drew iron, steel, silver, and gold. In a word, he is the inventor of all the arts. This gives the Chorus room to hope, that a Deity so useful to others, may be able to relieve himself. " You deceive yourselves, replies Prometheus; Destiny is superior to wisdom. The Fates and Furies govern Destiny, and Jupiter himself is subjected to them." " What, reply the Chorus, is it not his fate to reign for ever?" Prometheus answers this question no otherwise, than by saying, that he will take care not to explain himself on this subject; and that his deliverance from his bonds shall be the price of this secret. The nymphs, terrified at this impiety, express their abhorrence of it, according to the office assigned the Chorus; and represent to Prometheus, that his affection for mankind should not make him regardless of the anger of Jupiter, the sovereign of the Gods. They here advance a maxim, as the consequence of this system of destiny, which is, Never to forget that nothing is more delightful than to prolong life by pleasures and by hope.

A C T IV.

Io*, who unravels the intrigue of this play, arrives by chance in Scythia, not knowing whither her frenzy had led her. She enquires what place she is in of Prometheus, whom she is surprised to find in this condition. Then, without waiting for his answer, she feels herself agitated by one of her usual fits of frenzy. She fancies she sees the shade of Argus, who rises from his tomb to pursue her. " What, says she, have I done, oh son of Saturn, that I am thus cruelly treated? (It is to Jupiter that she thus addresses herself.) How canst thou delight in seeing me the victim of a horrid frenzy? Oh strike me with thy bolts, bury me within the bowels of the earth, give me up a prey to the monsters of the sea. Ah, envy me not the effect of these sad prayers. Too

* Io is the Goddess Isis, adored by the three hundred and forty-six years before the Egyptians. Inachus, her father, founded the kingdom of Argos; he reigned above

" long

" long have my restless wanderings lasted, and I know not when
 " .they are to have an end." Thus, and still more pathetically, speaks
 the grief of the unhappy Io. No one can with Dacier * be per-
 suaded, that she appears on the stage in the form of a cow; al-
 though an epithet relating to that transformation seems obscurely to
 hint it: but this is too ridiculous a supposition to have any foun-
 dation. It is sufficient, that the spectators are already informed,
 that this princess either imagined herself transformed to a cow, or
 that she really bore on her head some marks of her pretended me-
 tamorphosis.

Prometheus, as a Deity, knows her immediately. She is aston-
 ished at it; she enquires of him how long her miseries are to con-
 tinue. He is unwilling to answer for fear of afflicting her. She
 insists upon knowing: she urges him to speak. But Prometheus,
 before he will grant her request, intreats her to relate her adven-
 tures to the sea-nymphs, who are the sisters of Inachus her father.
 Io, to oblige her aunts, relates her history almost in the same man-
 ner as the Greek poets have done, and Ovid after them. Prom-
 theus then reveals to her the painful travels to which the jealousy
 of Juno still condemns her. This is a mere geographical descrip-
 tion, and I see no beauty it has in respect to the tragedy, except
 the suspension it occasions, by the curiosity which Prometheus ex-
 cites upon what he has still to say, and in flattering the Athenians
 by the recital of their fabulous annals. Io, terrified at a prophecy
 which threatens her with so many new misfortunes, resolves to de-
 stroy herself. " Ah, what would'st thou do then, replies Prom-
 " theus, if thou wert like me, wretched and immortal; I who
 " cannot cease to suffer till Jupiter ceases to reign." This predic-
 tion, which is the foundation of the tragedy, makes Io express
 her wishes, that her persecutor may be dethroned; and she inquires
 how this can be effected. " By a son more powerful than himself,"
 " replies Prometheus, who will also deliver me from these fetters."
 He refuses at first to be more explicit upon this article; but after-
 wards he by degrees shews, that her deliverer will be a descendent
 of Io's †, the thirteenth of her race: in a word, that it is Hercules,
 who, in spite of Jupiter, will break his fetters. But he does not ex-
 plain himself immediately; he leaves it to the choice of Io, whether

* Dacier's Aristotle's Poetics.

† Is not this a fabulous way of shewing,
 that the Hercules of Egypt and the Hercu-

les of Greece were the same? For Io, or
 Isis, whose posterity reigned in Egypt, was
 born in Argos.

she will know who this deliverer is to be, or hear what other misfortunes she is still to suffer. Io intreats him to satisfy her concerning both these articles, and interests the Chorus in her request; so that Prometheus, suffering himself to be prevailed upon, continues to give a detail of Io's travels, in the style I have already observed. At length he fixes the establishment of this princess and her posterity in Egypt†; and as a proof of the truth of his predictions, he describes the countries she had already traversed. He declares to her, that she shall bear a son to Jupiter, called Epaphus‡, whose dominions shall extend as far as the Nile; that the fifty Danaides, his descendants, shall return into Argos; that each of them shall kill her husband, except Hypermnestra only; that from her blood the deliverer he expects shall be born; and that he received this oracle from Themis. Io interrupts him with a new fit of frenzy with which she is seized, and which enlivens this scene. The Chorus deplore the misfortune of the future wife of Jupiter, and conclude the act with a fine moral upon unequal marriages.

A C T V.

" This inequality, resumes Prometheus, will be fatal to Jupiter himself. It will cost him his sceptre. I only, of all the Gods, can teach him the means of preventing his ruin, and of rendering the imprecations of his dethroned father ineffectual. His thunders will not secure him. Let him prepare for an enemy whom he knows not yet; an unconquerable foe, whose strokes will be more powerful and more sure than the fire of heaven, and the trident of Neptune." By this enemy he means the son of Jupiter and Alcmena.

The Chorus endeavour to inspire him with fear of the sovereign of Heaven. He finishes his prophecy with expressions of the utmost contempt of Jupiter. Upon this Mercury arrives, cutting the air with his wings. He commands Prometheus, in the name of Jupiter, to declare this fatal successor, whose usurpation he has predicted. " Thou speak'st like a slave of the new Gods, answers the prophet. Dost thou imagine

* Egypt, a vast country, which the ancients placed partly in Asia, and partly in Africa, by dividing it by the Nile. It is now placed wholly in Africa; the Arabian

gulph separates it from Asia.

† Epaphus, the son of Jupiter and Io, reigned in Egypt. He built Memphis.

" their

" their court secure ? Have I not seen two kings dethroned ?
" Ophion was one, Saturn the other----Away, I will not reveal
" my secret."

Mercury represents to him, that it was this very obstinacy which had drawn all his misfortunes on him. " I would not, answers " Prometheus, change my misfortunes for thy successful means." Here follows a very short and very spirited dialogue, which gives Prometheus an opportunity of shewing his invincible firmness. He resolves to be an enemy to Jupiter, and the rest of the Gods : he fears neither the thunder, nor the fall of the whole earth, and chuses to suffer for ever rather than be one moment a suppliant. His revenge is now so precious to him, that he is determined to gratify it at any price ; and he declares that he will not utter a word till Jupiter has given him satisfaction.

Mercury tells him, that he has orders to bury him in the ruins of the bursting rock ; and that he will be allowed to see the light again only to have his bowels become the prey of Vultures, and still renewed to be devoured. He conjures him to follow his advice before it be too late, and save himself by submission from this dreadful punishment. The Chorus join their intreaties to those of Mercury : but Prometheus, enraged to the last degree, obstinately refuses to comply ; so that the messenger of the Gods warns the nymphs to withdraw to a distance, to avoid the thunder. The nymphs refuse to leave the unhappy Deity. Immediately a dreadful noise is heard in the air. (It is Prometheus himself who first gives notice of it.) The thunder rolls, the earth trembles, the lightning flames, the unchained winds roar loud, clouds of dust obscure the sun, and air and sea are confounded together. " Thou " seest, continues Prometheus, invoking the aid of Themis his " mother, thou seest what torments they unjustly inflict upon me." That instant he disappears, either swallowed up in the earth, or carried away in a whirlwind, as M. Dacier supposes.

I have nothing to say of this piece, except that we find in it more of the ancient rudeness of dawning tragedy, mixed with much grandeur and elevation, than in any of the following plays of the same author. It is not impossible but that the subject, which, to use Dacier's expression, appears monstrous to us, is an allegory upon kings, and perhaps upon Xerxes or Darius, which must necessarily be extremely pleasing to a republic. Perhaps also it relates to the conquests of the Heraclidæ. But I acknowledge, that to me there appears not sufficient foundation for applying this enigma

enigma to any particular fact of history, nor to endeavour at embellishing this piece by allegorical interpretations, which, probable as they may seem, it will not perhaps admit. Yet it is certain, that the invectives of Prometheus against royalty must have been interesting to the Athenians, and that Eschylus in these passages had a view to please them. As for the rest, it is indeed not easy to comprehend what pleasure they could receive from this fabulous system, taking it literally, if it is not allowed that it was suited to the ideas and manners of antiquity.

T H E
S E V E N C H I E F S
A T T H E SIEGE O F T H E B E S.

OEDIPUS, whose history we have in the first part of this work, had by Jocasta two sons, Polynices and Eteocles, and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene.

He punishes himself for his involuntary crimes, by tearing out his eyes, and resigns his crown to his two sons. Eschylus supposes these ungrateful princes to repay his gift no otherwise, than by shutting up their unhappy father in a close imprisonment. Oedipus, in the form of an imprecation, predicts to them, that they shall destroy each other by the sword. To avoid the effects of this threat, Polynices and Eteocles agree never to be in Thebes at the same time, and to sway the sceptre in turn every year. Polynices reigns first; and, at the end of the year, faithfully performs the agreement, and yields the crown to his brother. But Eteocles, having tasted the sweets of dominion, was less scrupulous, and when his year was expired, refused to resign the sceptre to his brother. The injured Polynices retires to Adrastus king of Argos, and marries his daughter, on condition, that Adrastus will engage in his interests, and lead an army of Argives to the Siege of Thebes. The event of the combat fulfils the prophecy of Oedipus. The two brothers kill each other. Such is the subject of this tragedy of Eschylus. It is a Thebaid; but the title that Eschylus gives it is more suitable to his design; because the poem turns upon the seven warriors who attacked the seven gates of Thebes. Eschylus had written three plays upon subjects preceding this in the history of Thebes; namely, Laius, the Sphinx, and Oedipus. The Seven Chiefs is the only one of the four tragedies which has come down to us.

A C T I.

Eteocles appears first, with the anxiety of a king whose capital is soon to be exposed to the miseries of a siege, and who is preparing

paring to provide for all events. He is surrounded with his people, men, women, and children. Some he exhorts to defend the city bravely, and others to perform sacrifices to the Gods : at the same time he informs them, that a numerous army is approaching, whose designs he has taken care to discover by his spies. At that instant, one of them arrives, and acquaints him that he has seen the Argive army. " These eyes, says he, were witnesses of what
 " I am going to relate. I saw the seven warriors sacrifice a bull upon
 " one of their shields, each dip his hands in the blood, and swear,
 " with horrid oaths, by Mars and Bellona, and the bloody car-
 " nage of war, either to lay the city of Cadmus in ashes, or to
 " perish underneath its walls. Already with tears they load the
 " chariot of Adraustus with pledges destined for their friends, to
 " recal the sad remembrance of their deaths." For the prophet
 Amphiaraius, one of the seven warriors, had foretold, that only
 Adraustus should return to his own country : therefore the others
 confide to him the presents which, according to custom, they sent
 to their relations, whom they were never to behold again. " Pity,
 " continues the spy, is banished from their lips and hearts. Their
 " rage is unflamed like that of lions, who prepare to fight."

He adds, that he left them, after they had decided by lot which gate each was to attack ; and he advises Eteocles to oppose them with chosen warriors : " For all is prepared in the enemy's army,
 " says he ; they approach, they will be here in a few moments ;
 " the fields are covered with the foam of their steeds. Do thou,
 " like an experienced pilot, take the helm, and consider how to
 " defend us, ere the destroying breath of Mars comes over us :
 " seize the favourable moment, before these dreadful waves dash
 " over our heads, and a horrid deluge swallows all."

Eteocles has recourse to the Gods, in a short and pathetic prayer, after the manner of Eschylus, " Oh Jupiter ! Oh ye tutelary
 " Divinities ! Oh dreadful imprecation pronounced by my father,
 " do not this day, by the hands of the Argives, exterminate a
 " Grecian city, a city whose towers are consecrated to thee, &c." After this he retires to give the necessary orders.

The Chorus, composed of Theban virgins who had retired to the highest part of the city, near a temple, (the place where the scene is laid) express their fears in the most lively manner ; sometimes by striking pictures of the horrors of war, sometimes by affecting prayers to the Gods. They are seen to embrace their statues, to put crowns on their heads, and veiled, to implore the assist-

ance of Mars, Jupiter, Pallas, Neptune, Venus, and all the other Divinities, with a kind of eloquence peculiar to Eschylus.

ACT II.

Eteocles, on his return, perceives that the cries and exclamations of these virgins have spread terror and dismay throughout the city. He reproves them for it in very harsh terms, which certainly are not in our taste. He says, that women are always insupportable, in power haughty and imperious, in misfortune abject, their fear contagious, and ever ready to communicate itself to others. And, lastly, he threatens with death those of his subjects who shall dare to disobey him.

The Chorus of virgins alledge that they have reason for their complaints and supplications. During this dialogue, they fancy the enemy is close by them ; they think they hear the clashing of arms, and the neighing of horses. The king in vain endeavours to calm their fears. They redouble their cries and prayers. At length they promise to compose their minds, and to sing, after the manner of Choruses, a hymn in honour of the Gods, while Eteocles withdraws to chuse six chiefs, who, with himself, may oppose the leaders of the Argive army.

The hymn of the Chorus, which is divided into Strophes and Antistrophes, forms an admirable ode upon the miserable effects of war. It is full of sentiments and lively strokes, which paint the sack of a city delivered up as a prey to the enemy. It every where abounds with dreadful images : soldiers breathing rage and slaughter, ravished virgins, children murdered in the bosoms of their mothers ; and all this is so heightened by the terrors and pathetic action of the Chorus, that the enemy seem not to be at the gates, but in the midst of the city itself.

ACT III.

The spy returns with Eteocles, and gives him an account of the plan of the siege, which he had just been secretly observing. This scene is very long ; and might have been interesting to the Athenians, who knew Thebes, and the warriors mentioned in it. The spy begins, with naming Tydeus, as the first who undertakes the attack of one of the gates. He draws his character, and describes his shield, in the midst of which there is a moon in a sky sprinkled with

with stars. Eteocles draws a favourable omen from this symbol, and opposes Menalippus to this warrior. The Chorus approve his choice, and make vows for the Theban hero; and the whole scene, which gives name to the tragedy, goes on in this manner: for, as the spy names the leader who is to attack one of the gates, the king gives the command of it to a Theban warrior, still taking care to undervalue the emblem and arms of the assailant, which are always described. The Chorus then repeat their vows; and so on, till the seventh chief is named, which proves to be Polynices: and now Eteocles discovers, that it is he who must oppose his brother. He has a melancholy presage of the event. "Oh fatal
 "anger of the Gods! cries he; Oh wretched race of Oedipus!
 "Alas, my father's curses will be fulfilled---But tears and com-
 "plaints are unworthy of me. A more pressing evil demands my
 "care. Soon shall Polynices see what his vain emblem, of which
 "he boasts so much, will end in." This device is justice leading
 in a man in armour, with these words for a motto, "I will restore
 "this man to the throne of his father." Eteocles, making an
 allusion to this emblem, says, "No; justice never honoured him
 "with a look; she will not give her aid to an usurper; is it con-
 "sistent with equity, to join the party of a furious wretch who in-
 "vades his country? Armed with a just confidence, myself will
 "go to meet this Polynices, to fight and conquer him. King
 "against king, brother against brother, enemy against enemy,
 "I only should oppose him. Bring me my arms, &c."

The Chorus, seized with horror at this resolution, in vain endeavour to dissuade him from it. The king quits them, after a very beautiful dialogue, and goes out determined to confirm the imprecations of Oedipus; while the Chorus terminate this act by the usual song, in which they express their fears concerning the destiny of their kings, and the history of their fatal race.

A C T IV.

A man (probably the same person who all along acts as a spy) comes to inform the virgins that the city is safe; that the Thebans are conquerors at the attack of the six gates; but that Apollo had seized the seventh, to punish the crimes of Laius: in a word, that the two kings are dead by each other's hand. "They
 "agreed, says he, to dispute the possession of this kingdom in a
 "single combat. Their father's curse is accomplished; a tomb
 "will

" will now confine their fatal ambition, and Thebes is delivered
" from their rage."

At this unexpected news, the Chorus know not whether to give way to joy for their deliverance from the horrors of a siege, or to sorrow for the deplorable fate of their sovereigns. The latter prevails. They weep for the two brothers, whom a cruel jealousy had rendered competitors, and animated to the last excess of rage and despair. They begin the mourning with funeral songs, and words conformable to these songs. Immediately a crowd of citizens appear, bearing the bodies of the two kings.

Antigone and Ismene, their sisters, come to mix their lamentations with those of the Theban virgins. The latter divide into two Demi-Choruses, and sing or speak alternately, sympathising with the grief of the two princesses. " Ah, they cry, the city is filled with mourning. These walls, these towers, witness their grief, and the whole region weeps its kings. To their sad heirs they leave these rich possessions, the sources of their discord, and death the fruit they have reaped. " Oh Jocasta! most wretched of women and of mothers, who became the wife of thy own son, to give birth to two brothers, that have slaughtered each other.---Their hatred is extinguished in their blood; the kindred-streams mingled as they flowed, and undistinguished stained the ground. The murdering sword decides their quarrel. Relentless Mars, thus hast thou divided the inheritance of a father, whose dreadful imprecations thou hast accomplished.--- " Oh palace filled with horrors! at length the Furies have raised their dreadful voices to sing the ruin of a hapless race that like a dream is vanished. Vengeance fixed her standard at the gate where the unnatural brothers fought, and the black demon that animated them, relented not till both were slain."

Antigone and Ismene conclude these lamentations with a kind of duet, extremely fine, but not easy to render into our language. It is a continued antithesis, which turns upon the death given and received, and upon the mutual rage of Polynices and Eteocles.

A C T V.

This last act, if it is an act, which the interposition of the songs make it appear to be, is as short as the third is long. But the stage being continually filled with the Chorus, this inequality of

of the act, is less striking in the Greek tragedies than it would be in ours, which have not the same advantage

The song is interrupted by a herald, who publishes a decree of the Theban senate, which ordains sepulchral honours to Eteocles, as having fought for his country against enemies who came to destroy it; and, by the same decree, the body of Polynices is to be given a prey to the birds, for having exposed his country to the rage of a foreign army. This is expressed with great energy, and on the one side shews us how far the ancients carried their superstition, with regard to funeral honours; that their most ardent wishes were to be buried in their native land; and that nothing could be more dishonourable than the being deprived of a tomb. On the other side, it informs us, in what veneration they held their country in the Grecian states, when the most justifiable cause, even the usurpation of a crown, could not authorize the dethroned prince to return armed into his dominions.

Antigone, enraged at so injurious a decree, protests, that, if they refuse her brother these sacred duties, she will pay them to him herself. The dispute between the princess and the herald grows warmer every moment: at length the Chorus put an end to it. They join with Antigone, and separate into two bodies, one of which retires to perform the funeral of Eteocles, and the other that of Polynices. The unravelling of this tragedy is in the same taste with that of the Ajax of Sophocles. In both these poems, the last act seems to be superfluous, the action being closed by the deaths of the principal persons. But besides, that the religious veneration of the Greeks, with regard to the rites of the sepulchre, furnishes one argument in justification of Eschylus and Sophocles, another may be urged in their favour, which is, that a tragedy is left unfinished, when vice is not punished, and virtue rewarded. At least, the necessity of doing it, solves the doubleness of the action, and makes two in appearance but one in reality. Now this happens in the poem we have been examining, by means of the Theban council's decree. It is true, that the two brothers being dead, and the city delivered, the imprecation of Oedipus, which makes the ground of the subject, is accomplished, and consequently the action seems to be terminated. But Eteocles, although guilty of having fought with a brother, whose sceptre he unjustly detained, yet deserves to be lamented by the citizens whom he had defended; and Polynices, on the contrary, must be held

held in detestation by them, for having armed the Argives against his country. It follows then, that a reward and a punishment must be ordained at least: and this is what Eschylus has continued in imitation of Homer, who did not think the funerals of Patroclus misplaced, or foreign to the subject of the Iliad. Whether these reasons are allowed to have force or not; yet it is certain, that this piece is full of beautiful strokes of admirable suspensions, that it is interesting, and forms a surprising spectacle. Notwithstanding its extreme simplicity, it attains the true end of tragedy, which is to excite terror and compassion; so that Aristophanes* did not, without reason, introduce Eschylus boasting of this poem.

* See the Frogs, in the third part of this work.

T H E
P E R S I A N S. *

XERXES, the son of Darius, and grandson of Hystaspes, having made war on the Greeks by land and sea, was vanquished at Salamin, Platea, and Mycale. It was Themistocles who encouraged the Athenians at the battle of Salamin; relying, as it is said, upon an oracle, which commanded the Athenians to secure themselves with walls of wood. He made them build a great number of ships; yet still they had no more than three hundred to oppose a fleet of more than twelve hundred. Eschylus, it is well known, was present at the battle of Salamin; but he did not produce his tragedy upon this subject till eight years afterwards, under the Archon Menon. It is remarkable enough, that a subject so recent should be brought upon the stage; and that before Eschylus, there should have appeared one upon the same story, written by Phrynicus, who had undoubtedly treated it in the manner mentioned in the second preliminary discourse; that is, by recitation, accompanied by a Chorus. But the subject was so interesting to the Athenians, that it prevailed over that delicacy which makes a recent story less pleasing than an ancient one, without reckoning that the distance of place and difference of manners might render the Persians, in the eyes of the Athenian spectators, what Bajazet and the Turks (a cotemporary subject to us) are to ours; since, as Preface to Monsieur Racine justly observes, the distance of place is equal to Bajazet. distance of time, and both equally conciliate veneration, according to the proverb, *Major è longinquo reverentia.*

Yet this sort of subjects has been so seldom handled by the Greeks, that it is not difficult to perceive their notions on this article were the same as ours, with this difference only, that we carry our delicacy farther, and they oftener chuse ancient subjects, taken from the history of their own country, than we do.

A C T I.

Eschylus lays the scene before a temple, near the tomb of Darius in Susa. The Chorus is composed of the ancient men whom Xer-

* Persia, an ancient kingdom in Asia, was more famous than ever at the time Eschylus speaks of.

xes had appointed to govern the kingdom of Persia * in his absence; and these open the poem. They are represented assembled in council, as if to deliberate upon an affair of state: and, in effect, it is a matter of great importance which brings them together. Anxious and uneasy for the fate of Xerxes and his army, whom he himself had led against Greece, they begin to draw fatal presages from their having received no intelligence from their king. The old man, who speaks for the others, thus in a few words lays the foundation of what is to happen in the following scenes. He gives the spectators an idea of this great expedition, and the design Xerxes had formed; but so naturally, that it does not appear the poet had laboured for the audience; and in this consists the supreme art of Eschylus, and of the ancient tragic writers. "Alas, says this old man, the whole force of Asia is with its king. The people of Susa, Ecbatane, and Cissa, compose a double army by land and sea." It is thus that he enters into a detail of this enterprise, the leaders, the chariots, the vessels, the troops, and innumerable cities drained of their men to carry the war into Greece: a detail which certainly could not be unpleasing to the conquerors. "It is, adds he, the flower of the Persian youth, and of all Asia, whose return we have so long expected. The wives and relations of these warriors anxiously count the days and moments, and tremble at this long delay."

Such is the situation of these old men. Full of uneasy apprehensions, they follow in their imaginations the march of Xerxes, who had already passed the Hellespont †, and chained the sea: By these chains, they mean the bridge which he had thrown over this strait. He then comforts himself, by reflecting on the valour of his sovereign, "The glance of whose eyes is more dreadful than an enraged dragon; after him he drags an innumerable fleet and mighty army. Mounted upon a Syrian car, he leads Mars, the Mars of Persia, armed with arrows, against a people who defend themselves with the pike and javelin. What force can resist the impetuous torrent of such warriors? What ramparts hold out against these armed billows, more dreadful than

* See the eulogium of the Persians in that age, by Socrates, in the first Alcibiades of Plato, their greatness, their power, their riches, the majesty of their kings, the education of their children, &c.

† The Hellespont is a strait which se-

parates European Thrace from Troas, a province of Asia Minor. It takes its name from Helle, the daughter of Athamas, who perished there in her flight with Phryxus her brother, and the golden fleece.

" those

" those of the ocean? Yet, what mortal, (continues he, relapsing into his former inquietudes) what mortal can escape the snares of fortune? The inconstant Goddess with smiles allure them first, and ever after keeps them entangled in her toils. Destiny is an ancient Divinity. It is he who has filled the hearts of the Persians with this rage of war; sieges is their delight, and they enjoy the overthrow of states."

It is very probable, that the Chorus continue here in a song what they had begun to recite. They attribute to the Persians, if not the invention, yet at least a taste for the marine. At length, their apprehensions increase, when they reflect that their neighbours will soon perceive that Susa, and the other Persian cities, are destitute of warriors, and filled with fearful women only.

The person who had first spoke, now asks the others, what resolution is most proper to be taken in the cruel uncertainty they are in with regard to the fate of the Persian army? Hereupon the queen arrives, and begins the second act. The first act, which is nothing but a soliloquy, except the singing part, gives us a specimen of the tragedies which preceded those of Eschylus. Each of their acts was such as this; and it is really wonderful, that Eschylus should have been the inventor of the whole theatrical art, by first introducing the dialogue.

A C T II.

The queen, from the respect that is paid her by the old counsellors, is immediately known by the audience to be the wife of Darius, and the mother of Xerxes, the wife of one God of the Persians, and the mother of another, as the poet expresses it. She names herself Atoffa. Some learned men have supposed she was the Esther of the scripture; others say Vashti, the wife of Ahasuerus. Atoffa comes to consult the Chorus concerning a dream, which, besides many others she had had since the departure of the army, had tormented her the whole preceding night. She thought she saw two women of different beauty, and in different habits, one was in the Persian, the other in the Grecian dress. They seemed to be sisters: but Persia had fallen to the share of the former, and Greece was that of the latter. A quarrel arose between them. " My son, continues the queen, to prevent the consequences of this quarrel, harnessed them to the same chariot. " One of them cheerfully submitted, but the other fierce, intractable, and unable to endure the yoke, struggled to free her-

" self, and at length broke the chariot. Xerxes fell to the ground ;
 " Darius was present, and seemed to be filled with tender pity
 " for his son. Xerxes saw him, and tore his garments for rage
 " and grief." Such was her dream : but what follows is still
 more alarming.

Atoffa tells them, that as she was offering libations to the preserving Gods, to guard her from the misfortunes she dreaded, an eagle came and took refuge under the altar of the sun : at that instant a bird of less size and strength darted upon the eagle, and seized it in its talons : at length the trembling eagle suffered itself to be torn in pieces, without making any defence. The application was easy ; and accordingly Atoffa makes it to Greece and Xerxes. The old man, who speaks for the others, neither attempts to remove or to strengthen her apprehensions ; but advises her to supplicate the Gods, and to intreat her husband Darius, whose shade she had seen during the night, to render favourable those presages he had sent from the subterranean regions. It must certainly be that the Persians were very different from the French ; since this old man delivers his answers as the general decision of the whole council, whose sentiments he seems to have understood even by their silence. The queen following the usual course of the human heart, which seeks to be delivered from its anxiety, regards this decision as a fixed point where she ought to stop for her own tranquillity. Yet her fears recal the Grecian army to her thoughts. She enquires concerning their forces, of which she is ignorant ; a circumstance not very surprising in an age and country where women, instead of mixing in state-affairs, placed their chief glory in being wholly unacquainted with them. Atoffa, therefore, questions the old man with some degree of curiosity concerning Greece, her treasures, her manner of fighting, and her government : articles upon which custom obliges her to be ignorant ; but such ignorance would not be endured upon our theatre now. So true it is, that we ought never to lose sight of the manners of the people, when the ancient tragedies are under examination. The Chorus answer the queen in such a manner as increases her fears and her anxiety ; and, in this interval, which is but short, a courier from the army arrives. This puts an end to that suspension the poet had continued.

This courier, this messenger (for I know not what title to give to those persons whose office it then was to bring such intelligence to kings, republics, or the theatre, as changes the whole face of affairs)

affairs) whoever he is, comes to inform them of the entire loss of the battle, with an air that inspires terror and dismay. His relation, which is concise and lively, serves as an explanation of the old man's melancholy presages, and the queen's dream. The counsellors in despair regret the years they have passed before this miserable day. The courier's often interrupted recital, and the exclamations of the Chorus, are inexpressibly moving. It is nature itself: and indeed it is not very natural for a man to give a long and continued narration of a domestic misfortune, without being interrupted by cries, questions, and observations: Yet this is what generally happens upon the stage, through the necessity of making the recital short, and of impressing it on the minds of the audience. However, Eschylus, by attending to the natural movements of the heart, and by imitating exactly what passes daily in common life, has attained both these purposes. His recital grows more interesting, in proportion to the complaints of those who hear it. These complaints are likewise so lively and so beautiful, that it is injurious to Eschylus to let them pass; and it would be still more so to translate them, so difficult it is to catch that graceful simplicity which is every where predominant in the ancient authors of Greece. The strongest images which grief can suggest are here displayed; vessels wrecked, dead bodies floating on the waves, the wild despair of widows and of orphans: images which in us would excite admiration, were we in the same situation with the Grecian audience.

Atossa, overwhelmed with this news, as with a stroke of thunder, keeps a profound silence. At length she breaks it, to enquire after the fate of the princes. She dares not name her sons, through a delicate fear of hearing more than she desires to know. The messenger tells her that Xerxes lives; a welcome sound to the ears of a mother, tortured with the most dreadful apprehensions: he afterwards, in a few words, informs her what number of the principal lords had lost their lives in the battle. This has a little of the prolixity of Homer, on the subject of the dead and wounded; but the recital is not so long. The courier adds, that he has yet described but the smallest part of the misfortunes of the state.

The queen, a little recovered from her first astonishment, asks how it was possible for the Athenians to remain conquerors, with forces so far inferior. The messenger replies, that Destiny prevailed over numbers; that the vanquished had more than twelve hundred vessels, and the vanquishers only three hundred; and that from such

such an inequality it might be judged that some divinity, unfavourable to the Persians, had cast the balance on the side of the Grecians. Here follows a fine elogium for Athens, because it is put in the mouth of a foe. " Doubtless, says the queen, the Gods " watch over the defence of a city consecrated to Minerva." " Athens, resumes the messenger, is an impregnable city; her " citizens are her ramparts." He then pursues his relation, which I have almost wholly translated, to shew what was the genius of war in ancient times.

" It was not Xerxes who hurried on the action. An unfavourable Deity made use of a deserter from the Athenian army, to persuade the king, that if he waited for night, the enemy's fleet would not fail to disperse, and endeavour to escape, favoured by the darkness. Xerxes, who did not suspect this perfidious advice, separated his fleet into three squadrons, to occupy all the passages. He even caused the isle of Salamin to be invested, " that the Greeks might be surrounded on all sides." This is put into the mouth of Xerxes in the form of an harrangue. " He knew " not, adds the messenger, what fate the Gods had prepared for him. Mean time the night approaches, but the Greeks had no design to fly. As soon as the day appeared again, they made the shores resound with cries of joy. Terror and amazement possessed the minds of the Persians, who now saw themselves disappointed in their hopes. The Greeks advanced to the sound of trumpets; and bending over their oars, made the sea white with foam, and displayed their whole fleet. The right wing stood aloof, the rest followed, and soon were heard these cries from the midst of every vessel. Haste, brave Greeks, haste to the fight; save your country, your wives, your children, the temples, of your Gods, and the monuments of your ancestors. The general safety demands your utmost efforts. We answered their cries on our side: all delays were now impracticable. The vessels mingled, and struck each other, with their prows armed with iron. The battle was begun by a Grecian ship, which tore away the masts and sails of a Phœnician vessel. The whole Persian vessels sustained the enemies first shock; but as soon as our numerous fleet joined and entered the strait, they were no longer in a condition to succour each other. They ran foul of one another: the oars were shivered in pieces, while the Greeks wounded us on all sides. In a few minutes, nothing was to be seen but an universal wreck. The sea was covered with the

" sad spoils of our broken ships, and the dead bodies floated in
" heaps; even the shore cast back its load of dead into the sea.
" The Persians fled in disorder; and were pursued like fearful
" fish by the Greeks, making use of the broken bars, and other pieces
" of the wreck, to massacre them in their flight. Groans, cries,
" and exclamations, resounded far upon the waves. At length
" the shades of night put an end to the carnage." The courier
adds, that ten days would scarcely suffice to relate all the misfor-
tunes of this fatal battle: but, to comprise all in a few words, so
great a multitude of warriors never before perished in one day.

Atossa laments this loss. " You know not half of it yet, replies
the courier. Over against the island of Salamin there is an-
other, which is called Psytalia. There Xerxes had landed
with his whole court, and the flower of the Persian nobility,
with an intention to surprise the Greeks, if they came to take
refuge there. The Greeks, who were now conquerors, made
a descent upon it the same day, surrounded this body of troops,
and cut them to pieces. Xerxes, seated on his chariot, beheld
the slaughter from an eminence at a small distance. He tore his
robe, and uttering cries of grief, gave the signal for flight, and
fled himself in great disorder."

Here the queen interrupts the courier, by addreffing herself to
the cruel Genii, who, ever since the battle of Marathon, had de-
prived the miserable Persians of their reason. She asks what is
become of the wretched remains of the army? The courier tells
her, that almost the whole fleet had perished, and that very few
of the warriors in the land-army had had the good fortune to re-
turn into their country, after long wanderings and innumerable
dangers; that some have died of thirst, others of their wounds,
&c. Atossa acknowledges the truth of her dream: she retires to
offer libations to the earth, and to the dead; but, as she goes out,
she commands the Chorus to console the king her son, if he should
arrive before she returned.

The Chorus place before their eyes the general grief of Persia,
and begin a funeral song of a very singular kind. The couplets,
which are of the same measure, and the same number of verses,
according to the manner of Choruses, end in certain places by cries
and expressions of grief, which reciprocally answer each other,
stanza by stanza, as by echoes. The song concludes with la-
menting the fate of a kingdom, where henceforward the royal au-
thority, debased by this disastrous war, will no more be raised by
those

those adorations so dear to the Persians, and so despised by the Greeks.

This act is very full; and is therefore the principal one in the whole poem, as is likewise the third act of the preceding tragedy. These abridgments are sufficient to shew us the ancient taste of infant tragedy; for Eschylus has always one act, in which all the others meet as in their centre. It is worthy observation, that throughout the whole poem, the interest goes on increasing, till it has reached its utmost height. The messenger, for example, who gives the relation of the naval battle, does it so artfully, and by parts, that he always leaves something to raise surprise and curiosity. And this not only happens in each scene, and in each act, but from scene to scene, and act to act.

A C T III.

Atossa returns with all the preparations for a sacrifice to the infernal Gods. She begins with this moral speech: " My dear friends, the unhappy fear every thing, and those whom fortune favours now, think she will be always favourable to them." The queen shews that she is among the number of the unfortunate. She lays aside the splendor of royalty; she comes unattended, without her chariot, divested of all pomp, to the place where she is to offer her sacrifice, while the Chorus sing airs suitable to the public sorrow. The queen exhorts the old men to invoke the shade of Darius, that they may consult him concerning the public calamities. The Chorus sing, and the queen pours her libations of milk, wine, oil, meal, and pure water, with flowers. This ceremony has an air altogether magical, and suited to the stage. The invocations of the Chorus are full of energy, all in the praise of Darius, abounding in funeral images, and composed of correspondent stanzas, as in the preceding song. This, according to all appearances, is the whole third act, which consists, as we may observe, more in shew and action than in words.

A C T IV.

The shade of Darius suddenly rises from his tomb. He appears with all that majestic sweetness which rendered him while living, so loved and revered by his subjects. He addresses himself to the Satrapes first: " Ye faithful descendants of faithful subjects, says he, dear companions of my youth, what calamity afflicts the state? the earth roars, it opens wide: a nameless horror seizes me.

" me at the sight of my wife standing near my tomb. Yet I have
 " received her propitiatory offerings. But even you are employ-
 " ed in making funeral lamentations over my ashes. Why have
 " you forced my shade from those dark regions from whence it is
 " so difficult to return ? For well you know, the infernal Deities
 " are as greedy in receiving, as tenacious of their prey, when once
 " in their possession. However, such is my influence over them,
 " that I have instantly complied with your desires, and present
 " myself before you. Say then, what are the misfortunes under
 " which this kingdom groans ?" The Satrapes, trembling at the
 sight of this awful master, who, dead as he is, inspires them with
 terror, are silent. He encourages them to lay aside their former
 awe and respect, which, according to the custom of the Persians,
 they carry to the greatest height. Still they are silent : they are
 afraid to inform him of such dreadful misfortunes ; so unpleasing
 is truth to the ears of kings. Darius has recourse to his wife : " Oh
 " thou, answers she, whom a favourable destiny once elevated above
 " the happiest of mortals, whence did it happen that thou shouldest en-
 " joy such durable felicity ? Thou hast equalled the Gods themselves.
 " Ah, how greatly is thy fate to be envied ! Thou hast not lived
 " to see the miseries of thy groaning country. In one word, my
 " lord, Persia is ruined." " How ? resumes the shade ; by a pesti-
 " lence, or by a civil war ?" Atossa, still questioned, and still in-
 terrupted, says enough to inform him of what had happened.
 " Ah, replies Darius, the oracles are too soon fulfilled. It was
 " to my son that Jupiter reserved the accomplishment of them.
 " In vain have I implored the God to delay this calamity till a more
 " distant time. When mortals hasten to meet their ruin, Jupi-
 " ter helps to plunge them in the black abyss. My son is punish-
 " ed for his vain attempt to enslave the sea, and conquer Nep-
 " tune---Oh what blind rage ! what madness ! Alas, the immense
 " treasures of Persia will become the booty of the ravisher !"

" The misfortunes of Xerxes, replies the queen, are owing to
 " the pernicious counsels of the courtiers. They represented to
 " him, that it was by war thou hadst acquired such vast riches
 " for thy heirs ; while Xerxes, satisfied with enjoying them, in-
 " stead of adding to them by the same labour, resigned himself up
 " to trifling amusements." " Fatal effect of their reproaches ! an-
 " swers Darius ; the forces of the state are now exhausted." He
 then artfully runs over the actions of all the kings of Persia which
 preceded him, he being the eighth. He attributes the present

calamities to the youthful temerity of his son, and ascribes to his own wisdom all the honour of the former prosperity of the Persians.

The Chorus consult him upon the present situation of affairs.
 " Raise no more armies, replies he, against Greece; for although
 " you had one superior to that you have lost there, the earth it-
 " self would arm in favour of the Greeks." (He says this, be-
 cause many of the fugitive Persians perished, for want of food.)
 " But suppose, answer the Satrapes, that we should still be able
 " to form a powerful army?" " Alas, replies Darius, even that which
 " you have still remaining in Greece, will not return; few, very few
 " will repass the strait. The oracle will be fully accomplished.
 " Judge of the future by the past. In vain has Xerxes left a cho-
 " sen army in Beotia. (Xerxes left Mardonius there, who perish-
 " ed in the battle of Platea.) All the miseries that are due to rash
 " temerity and unsuccessful projects will fall upon them. The
 " images of the Gods profaned, altars overthrown, temples razed
 " to the ground; all cry for vengeance. The Persians are guilty.
 " They are punished now, and long will they be punished; mis-
 " fortunes upon misfortunes shall overwhelm them. The fields of
 " Platea shall behold so many warriors fall by the Grecian sword,
 " that ages to come shall, by the vast heaps of dead, be taught how
 " ill it suits with mortals to be proud. Pride is a seed which, as
 " it grows, produces ripening miseries, and promises a lamentable
 " harvest. Keep these chastisements ever in your view, and re-
 " member Athens and Greece. Henceforward let the king be-
 " ware of despising the happiness he is possessed of, and of envy-
 " ing that of another. Let him not lavish his treasures in destruc-
 " tive wars. Jupiter, who hates presumptuous enterprizes, is al-
 " ways ready to confound them. And you, ye reverend old men,
 " who guide my son's unskilful youth, teach him, by your pru-
 " dent counsels, no more to irritate the Gods by his vain arrogance:
 " And do thou, Oh queen, take the royal ornaments, and hastes
 " to meet the king. In the wildness of his grief he has torn his
 " robes. Endeavour to console him: he will listen to none but
 " thee. Farewel; I return to the regions of eternal night. Live
 " happy, ye reverend old men, in spite of these misfortunes, en-
 " joy the remainder of your days, and remember, that all the riches
 " of the universe are useless to the dead." The shade of Darius
 disappears, Atossa retires to perform his commands, and the Chorus,
 which remain still filled with veneration for their former mon-
 arch, extol the happiness of his reign in prejudice to that of

Xerxes,

Xerxes, whom they indirectly charge with imprudence, and lament his youth. " Oh Gods, cry they, how soon have our happy days vanished for ever! Oh blest administration in which we shared, when a prince, mature in years and wisdom, patient of suffering, irreproachable, invincible, equal to the Gods, gave laws to this happy land. Then were we successful in peace and war: all was prosperous at home and abroad: our triumphant armies returned unmolested to their joyful country. How many cities has he not taken, even without stirring out of the walls of his palace!" Here follows the enumeration of them, which I omit, as well as that of the kings of Persia, and the places where the broken remains of the army after the battle of Salamin took refuge, that I might not load with dissertations a work in which taste only is considered.

This act must be acknowledged to be a master-piece. It is an elogium of Darius upon the Athenians, and, at the same time, a satire against Xerxes, which certainly must be extremely pleasing to the haughty conquerors, who saw themselves so artfully praised even by their enemies; and a great political stroke of Eschylus, who, by so lively a picture of the fatal effects of pride and ambition, tacitly dissuades the Athenians from continuing the war against the Persians. The latter in effect offered to make reparation for all the ravages they had committed in Greece, and after so many repeated checks, seemed to wish earnestly for a peace. The inclinations of the Athenians even leaned this way; but Themistocles alone determined them to carry on the war, as we have already observed in the third discourse, in the first part of this work.

A C T V.

Xerxes arrives with a train, and an appearance suitable to a king in his melancholly situation; and indeed this act is but a continued expression of his grief. " Ah, how miserable am I," cries he immediately, to have proved a fate so cruel, and not to have foreseen it! Barbarous fortune! with what violence hast thou struck my wretched kingdom! what shall I do, unhappy as I am? The sight of my orphan citizens freezes me with horror. " Oh that Jupiter had wrapt me in eternal night, with those who fell in battle!" The Chorus enter into the grief of their king; and frankly own, that he has peopled the subterranean regions with the Persian nobility. Xerxes imputes these misfortunes wholly to himself, and the Chorus join with him to mourn in form, after the manner of the Persians. This is done with some kind of

method here, and throughout the whole poem; for the old counsellors question Xerxes concerning the fate of the principal warriors (a numerous, and to that audience, a most interesting list) and the king has nothing but melancholy informations to give them. They answer him in their turn with the most lively expressions of sorrow. The king shews them his empty quiver, the poor remains of all the preparations he had made for this war. He is astonished that he still preserves a ray of reason. Their complaints and cries increase, and Xerxes himself sets them the example. This is exactly the mourning described by Quintus Curtius for the death of Syrigambis. At length the old men, after beating their breasts, and tearing their garments and their hair, retire with Xerxes, and conduct him to the palace.

There are certainly great beauties in this piece. The distress continues rising from the beginning to the end. The characters are well marked, the scenes are clear, expressive, well connected, and beautifully unravelled. All proceeds so natural and easy, that the spectator seems not to be present at a dramatic representation, but at a council of Satraps, who are overwhelmed with repeated accounts of calamities. Eschylus has transmitted to this poem the spirit which animated him when he was a witness of the defeat of Xerxes. The plan, we see, is very simple: but if in our age we should write on a similar subject, it would be difficult to open the scene in a manner more noble for the continuance of the time, the place, the entries, the exits, and the interests of the personages. And I will even venture to say, that in this respect great advantage will be had from Eschylus, and perhaps considerable good will result from the specimens which I have given, since those who love the theatre would probably be glad to employ themselves in studying in one of the noblest originals of polite antiquity, those wonderful combinations of circumstances, of which the sketches they have seen here will discover the original. And even those, whose esteem for the ancients is not very high will at least profit by what the general consent of all mankind allows to be beautiful in them. If any one shall obstinately reproach Eschylus with the nearness of the time in which the two battles were fought where he himself had been engaged, they ought at least to pardon him, in consideration of the great interest which reigns throughout a tragedy which fills the audience with a malignant compassion for Xerxes, whom they had conquered, and with whom they were still at war. In Athens all was made subservient to the public good, even to the amusements of the theatre.

A G A-

A G A M E M N O N.

AGAMEMNON, king of Argos and Mycène, had promised Clytemnestra, that, as soon as he had taken the city of Troy, he would inform her of it by a certain signal agreed upon between them. This signal was a lighted torch, which was to be placed upon an eminence, as a sign for all the neighbouring places to do the same, till the light might be perceived at Argos. This signal Agamemnon gave, and immediately afterwards arrived himself with Cassandra, his captive, whom he brought with him from Troy. But Clytemnestra, who was not so desirous of her husband's return as of his death, murdered him, with the assistance of Egisthus, who was her lover. This play was first acted under the Archon Philocles, in the second year of the 28th Olympiad.

"The Agamemnon, says father Rapin, is almost unintelligible." It must be confessed, indeed, that this tragedy is not easy to understand : for, besides its having been often confounded with the Coëphores that followed it, and incorrectly printed, notwithstanding the labours of many learned men, it is not wholly free from faults, even in the state which Stanlei has given it to us ; there are many metaphors, figures, and particular turns, which he cannot boast of having explained. It was this which made the famous * Samaïse say, who had not Eschylus so correct as we have him, "Who can prove that Eschylus is more intelligible than the Evangelists, and the epistles of the Apostles ? The Agamemnon of that poet singly exceeds in obscurity all the sacred books, whether Hebrew and Syriac idioms."

A C T I.

The person employed to watch when the torch is kindled begins the poem. He appears standing upon a platform of the palace, and implores the Gods to put a period to the painful task which Clytemnestra had confided to him. He says, that he has long had no other society than the stars ; but that what he has observed in them is likely to be fatal to Agamemnon. By this suspicion, he hints at the treacherous designs of Clytemnestra. While he complains of an employment which affords him no other means of alleviating his solitude than by singing, or by lamenting the bad administration of the government, he suddenly discovers the expect-

* Cl. Salm. de Hellenisticâ Ep. dedit.

ted signal, and prepares to give the queen, who is in bed, immediate notice of what he had seen. Thus the time and place are determined. The one the morning, and the other the entrance to the palace at Argos. Before he retires, he makes known his resolution to take part with his king; but this is all he says, doubtless to avoid anticipating the events. The Chorus, which is formed of old men of the council of state, enter without any preparation, but probably by Clytemnestra's commands. These ministers know nothing of the signal agreed upon between the queen and Agamemnon, and the news of taking Troy. Their conversation turns immediately upon this city, and the siege which they had never approved, and had endeavoured to dissuade Agamemnon from undertaking. " This is, says the chief of them, the tenth
 " year since Agamemnon and Menelaus departed with their thou-
 " sand ships, like vultures, who, having lost their young, fly
 " round their nests, in hope of punishing the barbarous ravisher.
 " But alas, who knows what will be the event of so many battles!
 " Human affairs follow the course of destiny, by which they are
 " regulated. In vain do we offer sacrifices to the Eumenides,
 " and weep before their altars; their anger is never to be appeased." They declare, that contrary to their inclinations, their age had kept them from the war, shut up amidst their towers. They enquire of Clytemnestra, though she is not present, what extraordinary events had induced her to send for them to the palace. Accordingly, we must conclude, from reading this scene, that Clytemnestra had sent for them; that she is seen at a distance offering sacrifices to the
 " Gods. The altars, says the old man, are perfumed with libations,
 " the lamps blaze round them." He intreats the queen to tell him the cause of this, and to free him from the uncertainty he labours under; since hitherto all the presages concerning the Trojan war had been as often unfortunate as favourable.

The queen wholly intent, as it should seem, upon her sacrifice, makes no answer; and these questions appear to be introduced here only to signify, that the Chorus come to make enquiries concerning the siege, when she shall be at leisure to listen to them.

The old men, who had declared that they were not capable of going to the battle, yet find themselves strong enough to sing a very long hymn upon the enterprize undertaken by Agamemnon. This is done in the manner of Choruses, while Clytemnestra is employed in the sacred ceremonies. It is a kind of prophetic funeral-song that they sing with this burden, which returns after a certain num-

ber of verses, "Sing, sing funeral strains, but fortunate be the omen." This hymn cannot possibly be rendered into any other language, it is so perplexed and mysterious. Agamemnon and Menelaus are there represented under the figure of two eagles, or birds of prey, which express their different characters. The two eagles tear in pieces a rabbit big with young, which they had taken after a long pursuit. The meaning of this is, that the two leaders of the Grecian army had imprudently hunted in a wood consecrated to Diana. The offended Goddess, continue the Chorus, declared her will by the mouth of Calchas, who predicted many misfortunes to the family of Agamemnon after the taking of Troy. These misfortunes are expressed in a kind of enigma, which just hints at the catastrophe of the play. It is an oracle pronounced by Calchas, which the old men repeat, without having yet discovered the meaning. This oracle is followed by another, wherein Agamemnon is commanded to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to appease Diana, and procure favourable winds for the fleet, which had been long detained in the port of Aulis. The sacrifice which succeeds, is painted with those bold and often aggravated strokes for which Eschylus is remarkable. The Chorus introduce Agamemnon speaking; he fluctuates like a father, and determines like a king. Iphigenia is represented extended as an innocent victim upon the altar; and the tenderness and concern which her youth, her beauty, and her moving looks, excite in the whole army, are described. "I saw no more," says the principal speaker of the Chorus, "and I am silent." But he returns again to the first oracle pronounced by Calchas, the meaning of which, he declares, he is neither able nor willing to penetrate into: "For alas," continues "he, why should we anticipate the melancholy future? why should we be miserable before the appointed time?"

He therefore contents himself with removing these unfortunate presages by prayers and wishes. All this Grecian doctrine of fatality arises from ignorance, but more especially from the weakness of the human heart, which seeks, as much as possible, to suppress the thoughts of these misfortunes which it fears. This is what Pyrrhus says to Orestes, in the *Andromache* of Racine:

* Seigneur, tant de prudence entraîne trop de soin:
Je ne scâi point prévoir les malheurs de si loin.

* *Andromache*, Act I. Scene II.

A C T II.

The Argive counsellors, seeing Clytemnestra approach, salute her respectfully, and ask upon what happy expectations she sacrifices to the Gods. "Troy is taken, replies Clytemnestra." The Chorus astonished, as may well be imagined, at such unexpected news, and ignorant likewise of the signal which Agamemnon had agreed to give, are under some difficulty how to believe the queen. She tells them the manner in which this intelligence has been conveyed to her, which was by lighted torches from space to space, from mount Ida to the gates of Mycene. She fancies she hears the dying groans of the enemy, and the joyful shouts of the conquerors, who are plundering the riches of Troy. At length she wishes that the army may raise no obstacle to their happy return, by an impiety like that which had so long retarded their voyage to the city of Priam. "For vengeance, adds she, will pursue the conquerors, although they should not have the usual accidents of fortune to fear."

The Chorus, in gratitude to the Gods for this conquest, join in the sacrifice offered by Clytemnestra, and sing a hymn, which is very different from the preceding one. It begins thus: "Oh sovereign of the Gods! oh favourable night, thou hast spread thy gloomy veil over the walls of Troy, and involved all her wretched citizens in slavery." The ode turns upon the punishment which, sooner or later, the Gods inflict on those who are guilty of the enormous crimes that Paris was. The rape of Helen is the most striking picture in this piece. "Helena, says the Chorus, fled and left us a cruel war, with all its attendant horrors, to carry with her inevitable ruin, as a portion to Troy. She fled in secret from the palace of her husband. Oh execrable crime! In vain did the priests recal her, uttering these funeral cries! Oh abandoned palace! Oh wretched sovereign of this land! Oh violated nuptial bed! Alas, nothing remains of Helen but a vain picture, which incessantly awakens the grief and rage of a wronged husband; a husband who adored her, and whom she quitted to pass the faithless feast &c." The rest is full of the like images.

The Chorus, notwithstanding their congratulations upon the news they had so lately heard, yet are still apprehensive that there may be no foundation for their hopes; and that the whole city will be put into commotion by a false report.

A C T . III.

Hereupon Clytemnestra, who is not yet gone off the stage, proves the truth of the signal she had received, by shewing the Chorus a herald, who arrives crowned with branches of olive. This man begins with adoring his natal earth, according to the custom of the ancient travellers when they returned home, and invokes the Gods of the country to be propitious. He afterwards addresses himself to the palace of Agamemnon. “ Palace revered, says “ he, beloved assylum, ye tutelary Deities, if ever you received your “ king with joy, receive him now, after so long an absence. “ Agamemnon returns, like a bright star, to dissipate the shades “ of darkness. Receive the conqueror of Troy. That haughty “ city is no more; her temples, her altars are overthrown. The “ harvests of her fruitful fields have perished. The elder of the “ Atridae returns a hero crowned with conquest: he of all mortals is most worthy of our honours. The impious Paris is punished.”

Here Clytemnestra interrupts the herald, and holds a very artful conversation with him. She gives him to understand, that she has suffered greatly during the absence of her lord, so far as to wish death. To whom? This has a double meaning: her design is, to kill her husband, and raise her lover to the throne. The herald, who supposes her to have been very much afflicted, consoles her, by recounting the sufferings of the army during a siege of ten years. “ Who but the Gods, says he, are exempted from the reverses of “ fortune! Ah, were I to relate to thee all our labours, our watch-“ ings, the miseries we felt at sea! not a day has passed without “ groans and complaints. He then enumerates the fatigues they “ endured on land. But why, adds he, should we afflict ourselves now? when all sorrows are at an end, as well with regard “ to the dead as to the remainder of the Grecian army. We “ must forget our misfortunes. Victory is at length ours, and “ rewards us for all our losses.”

The queen shews no inclination to hear more. She will retire, she says, to make preparations for the reception of her lord, and will hear from his own mouth the particulars of his conquest. She sends the herald back to him, to let him know how ardently she wishes to see him. She adds, with some tenderness, that he will find her faithful; and, what is singular enough, she says this in seven or eight verses, that he may not doubt it. The herald re-

plies, that it becomes a virtuous woman to speak her own praises; and the Chorus add, that the queen is in the right. Here is a fine subject for the sneerers at antiquity, who will not enter into the simplicity of its manners.

After Clytemnestra withdraws, the old men continue the scene with the herald. They desire to be informed of the fate of Menelaus. We lost sight of that prince's vessel in a tempest, replies the herald, and we know not what is become of him, not even whether he is alive or dead. He tells this with some difficulty, as not being willing to prophane that happy day with such melancholy news. He therefore concealed this misfortune from the queen: however, he now, in a few words, describes the tempest in which the Grecian fleet was surprised in its return. He flatters himself with hopes, that all the ships which were dispersed will safely arrive, particularly that of Menelaus, and ends with a wish to that effect, which gives room to the Chorus to resume their songs.

These begin with reflexions upon Helena, whose very name expresses the miseries she has been the cause of; namely, the loss of the ships, the deaths of the warriors, and the ruin of Troy. "She
" carried a fatal alliance to Troy." The Chorus here play upon a word, which signifies both alliance and misfortune. " She has
" revenged, continue they, the violated laws of hospitality, even
" upon those who celebrated this fatal Hymen with songs of
" gladness. The ancient city of Priam has paid dear for the
" short triumph; her cheerful songs are changed to groans and
" lamentations."

The remainder signifies, that Paris so lovely, so engaging, while a child, but haughty and presumptuous in his riper years, carried away Helena under auspices so horrible, that a fury formed the ties of this adulterous marriage; and from their crime a race resembling themselves is produced; impiety, remorse, and despair: that justice, with eyes averted, fled with horror from the gilded domes of the wicked, and sought an asylum in the chaste dwellings of righteous men, however mean and humble. There is equal strength and energy throughout this whole ode: but it will as little admit of a translation as the preceding ones, which is the fate of all the Choruses of Eschylus.

A C T IV.

Agamemnon appears upon his car, returning like a conqueror to his own country. He is followed by Cassandra, his captive,

feated

feated on another car. The counsellor of state, who speaks for the rest of the Chorus, makes him a kind of harangue, of which this is the sense : He tells him, that he is at a loss in what manner to express himself, that he may not offend the laws of decorum. Flatterers, says he, accommodate their words and looks to the apparent joy or sorrow of their sovereign, without being moved with either of these passions : but a wise prince will not suffer himself to be imposed upon by appearances. He afterwards says, that he had disapproved of the armament and the enterprize against Troy ; but that he now rejoiced at the happy event of it, and resigns the authority with which he had been invested into the hands of his king, whose prudence will soon discover and distinguish those who have acted well or ill during his absence.

Agamemnon first adores the Gods of the country who had favoured his return, and overthrown Troy. " These Gods, says " he, the just arbitrators between us, without listening to the " voice of mortals, put in one bloody urn the lot of death for " Ilion, in another the hope of Greece. Troy still smokes, and " from her ashes black clouds are still exhaled, the only remains " of all her former wealth."

After this short prelude, the king addresses himself to the old men, and thanks them for the part they take in his victory. " It " is not often, says he, that a successful friend can be had with- " out jealousy. Envy takes possession of the human heart : this " monster doubles the burden of his slaves, by adding to their mis- " fortunes the happiness of others. Experience has taught me " this. I see, as in a mirror, the sentiments of those whom I con- " verse with, and have scarce ever found more than the dissembling " shade of friendship. Ulysses, who contrary to his inclinations, " engaged in this enterprize, was alone fixed in my interest, and " my true support. This justice I owe him, whether he is alive " or dead." He then declares, that after he has celebrated games in commemoration of his conquest, he will apply himself to what concerns the government of the state, and remedy the disorders that may have crept into it. As he is preparing to retire into his palace, Clytemnestra comes to meet him.

The speech she makes him is sufficiently long. After apologising for what she is going to say, she tells him, that she will lay aside that reserve which insensibly decreases every day, and freely recount all her sufferings during the absence of her lord. Solitude, anxiety, mysterious reports, unfavourable news, continual alarms,

all have conspired to make her miserable. She has even attempted more than once upon her own life, which the cruel solicitude of others has still preserved to her. She informs the king, that their son Orestes is absent; that apprehending some fatal revolution, if Agamemnon had the misfortune to fall before Troy, she had confided him to the care of foreigners. "It is natural, says she, for
 " the malignity of mankind to crush those intirely who begin to be
 " depressed." Her eyes, she says, unused to flumbers, but ever open to tears, have lost all their lustre; even in those moments when she but seemed to taste repose, a thousand horrid dreams tormented her, and the least noise would rouze her drooping senses: but, at the sight of her victorious lord, all her afflictions were forgot. This sudden and unexpected return filled her with more joy than a father feels at the sight of an only son; than the appearance of land to mariners long harrassed with a tempest, or a pure stream to the thirsty traveller. "Let us go then, my dearest lord,
 " (pursueth she) alight from this chariot--Yet stay; profane not
 " thy sacred steps, the steps of Troy's great conqueror. Let the
 " richest carpets be brought hither: it is fit that a monarch who
 " returns triumphant into his dominions, should tread on gold and
 " purple."

This studied speech, which holds the place of those transports of tenderness and joy, with which tender wives receive their husbands after a long absence, marks well the dangerous character of Clytemnestra, who has already resolved the death of her lord; and shews likewise the infinite art of Eschylus, in making his persons speak in a manner conformable even to their concealed passions. For Clytemnestra, being upon the point of committing so impious an action, could not surely be expected to speak like other wives: and Agamemnon, although ignorant of the horrid conspiracy, yet perceives the affectation and impropriety of this behaviour. He even observes to her, that her discourse has been *long, and suitable to an absence of so many years.* "No, replies he, there is no need
 " of so many preparations. Treat me not like a stranger, or a
 " woman, and still less like a God. Lay not these rich carpets on
 " my path; a mortal should tremble to admit such honours, which
 " are due only to the Gods: nor are these trifling distinctions necessary to increase my fame, or make my conquest known."

Here we have the contrast of an impious woman, or rather a Fury, with a religious and popular king; and the spectator is disposed to conceive compassion for the one, and horror for the other:

This

This artifice is used with great success from the beginning of the poem ; yet there is nothing said which can give room for the crime Clytemnestra was meditating, to be guessed at. The event is already prepared, since every thing directly leads to it, and is not anticipated, because the secret is kept to the last.

Clytemnestra, as if she would raise the value of her intended victim, presses Agamemnon so earnestly to receive the honours she offers him, that he is obliged to yield to her importunity. After this little contest of affected respect on her side, in which she tells him, that it is glorious even for conquerors to suffer themselves to be conquered, the king permits his travelling robe to be taken off, and puts on one of purple ; yet with a kind of fear, lest some jealous Deity should perceive him. As he descends from his chariot, he expresses his scruples to trample such riches under his feet. He exhorts the queen to treat his captive Cassandra with tenderness. " For the Gods, says he, look with favourable eyes upon those " who use their power with moderation, and there is no mortal " who willingly suffers slavery."

He extols the merit of this unfortunate princess, who is the daughter of Priam, and had been bestowed upon him, as what was most valuable among the spoils of the Trojans. He then reluctantly passes to his palace, upon the purple carpets that had been spread for him ; and the queen, still continuing her affected kindness and veneration, tells him that the sea has inexhaustable stores of purple ; and that she, far from regretting such a trifling sacrifice, would have vowed much more to the Gods for the return of a husband so beloved : that she looks upon him as the tree, whose kindly shade will guard their house from the inclemency of the seasons. " Great " Jupiter, cries she, concluding her speech, accomplish my wishes, " and what thou hast thyself undertaken to perform." A barbarous prayer, which the credulous Agamemnon believes is offered up for him.

The Chorus, who remain upon the stage, reflecting on their king's return, and this interview between him and Clytemnestra, are astonished to find that the predictions of Calchas, mentioned in the first act, incessantly occur to their minds, in spite of them. " It is an oracle (says he, who speaks for the rest) which was not " forced by authority, nor purchased with bribes. It keeps pos- " session of our memory ; in this far different from those torment- " ing dreams which vanish with our sleep. I see Agamemnon " again, and yet some unknown Fury presages funeral airs. There

" is

" is a secret foreboding in my heart, which renders it insensible to
 " joy. Alas, the predictions of a troubled heart are but too just.
 " Grant, Heaven, my fears may be found groundless! Health,
 " however flourishing, has its period, and disease glides unper-
 ceived into the human frame. The most solidly built for-
 tune dashes itself against an unseen rock. To ordinary calamities
 remedies may be applied. A vessel escapes being wrecked,
 at the expence of its riches, which are cast into the sea.---But
 " oh, by what enchantment can life be restored to those whose
 blood has followed the assassin's knife? The rest is wrapt in the
 impenetrable shades of fate, and my presaging heart has antici-
 pated my tongue." Here, doubtless, we have suspicions of what
 is to happen, very strongly marked. But these are forebodings
 which have too little foundation to make it necessary to warn the
 king of his danger, tho' sufficient to prepare the spectator for the event.

A C T V.

Clytemnestra, having conducted her husband into the palace, returns immediately, and invites Cassandra to alight from her chariot, assuring her she will make her captivity as light as possible. "The house, says she, which thou art going to enter, has long flourished in prosperity and grandeur. It is such only as have lately risen to unhoped for honours and riches, who make cruel and insupportable masters." Cassandra overwhelmed with grief, and in reading likewise in futurity the parricide that will be committed by the queen, keeps an obstinate silence, which so enrages Clytemnestra, that she retires, after having treated her with great rudeness.

As soon as the queen is gone, Cassandra, with loud cries, invokes Apollo. At this the Chorus express some surprize. "Why should she address herself to this Deity in her misfortunes? (says the first person of the Chorus.) Is it as a prophetess, that she invokes him? for it is well known that Cassandra was one." "Oh Apollo, (cries the captive princess) whither hast thou led me? To a house polluted with crimes! to horrid slaughter!" Cassandra, we see, enters suddenly into one of her prophetic frenzies. This passage was thought a master-piece by the ancients, but it is impossible to give a just idea of it. It is filled with the most lively exclamations, perpetually interrupted by the Chorus, and with enigmas which unfold themselves by degrees, and images inimitably beautiful. She recounts all the murders committed in this fatal palace, beginning with that of the son of Thyestes. " I

["] see

" see the wretched infants murdered, and their limbs served up
 " to the table of their father---Oh Gods, to what new crimes
 " will this horrid palace be a witness! Barbarian, is this the treat-
 " ment thou reservest for a husband, after washing him with thy
 " own hands? The murder is resolved on; the fatal blow will
 " soon be struck; their impious hands are eager to conclude their
 " work---Oh Heaven, what is it I see? a net furnished by hell?
 " No; it is a veil which covers the nuptial bed, and becomes an
 " accomplice in the murder of a husband." (For Clytemnestra
 threw a robe over Agamemnon, as he was coming out of the
 bath, and then stabbed him.) " Oh may an infatiate Fury pur-
 " sue her to death with horrid howlings? Of what Fury dost thou
 " speak? (says the Chorus) Why these howlings? I tremble with
 " horror; my blood freezes in my veins."

Cassandra continues. " Remove the bull from the heifer: he
 " is entangled in the net; they strike him; he falls; the bath re-
 " ceives him." It is the death of Agamemnon, and her own,
 which she thus describes. For immediately afterwards she adds,
 " Oh miserable fate! my own too approaches fast. Oh why, ye
 " Gods, why was I brought here to suffer it?----Ye reverend old-
 " men, ye compare me to Philomela, who in sad accents laments
 " incessantly her Itys. Alas, changed to a bird, the Gods bestow-
 " ed on her a pleasing life: but I am reserved for strokes far more
 " severe.---Oh Paris, thy hymen has been fatal to thy family!
 " Oh river of Scamandra! soon shall I visit the gloomy shores of
 " Cocytus and Acheron.---Oh unavailing efforts of my ruined
 " country, ye pious sacrifices so oft repeated by my father, what
 " have you produced? Troy lies in ashes, and I die."

Cassandra, tho' always interrupted by the Chorus, who hear
 only part of her predictions, pronounces them with an action
 which certainly required an excellent player. The women's parts
 were acted by men; and the Greeks being fine comedians, the
 effect this scene produced on the audience is not to be wondered at.
 At length she recovers, and tells the Chorus, that she is now going
 to speak without any enigma. She declares, that the Furies will
 never abandon this palace: that Comus, the God of mirth and
 feasts, will never appear there but deformed with blood, and al-
 ways accompanied by the infernal Divinities, (alluding to the
 feast of Atreus and Thyestes, and to that which Clytemnestra
 makes for Agamemnon.) That already the Goddesses of Hell were
 singing the funeral hymn before the palace-gates. The Chorus
 are

are astonished, that a foreign princess should be so well acquainted with the history of another kingdom, and speak its language. Cassandra tells them, that Apollo, who was in love with her, taught her the science of Divination ; but that, after she had obtained this gift, she deceived the passion of the God ; and the consequence was, that no one believed her predictions with regard to Troy. Virgil gives the same account of Cassandra. *Non unquam credita Teucris.* Again she is seized with a prophetic fury. “ See you not, says she, those children seated at the gate like nocturnal phantoms ? they were murdered in this palace. They hold their flesh and bowels in their hands ; horrible food ! which their own father devoured. It is in revenge of this, that a concealed lion, base and cowardly, seeks the life of my master ; for that is the title my cruel fortune obliges me to give him. Yes, this commander of a thousand ships, this haughty conqueror of Ilion, knows not the snares that are laid for him by an execrable monster, who is preparing to plunge a dagger in his bosom. Ah, by what name shall I call her ? Is it a woman who dares to perpetrate a crime so horrid ? Is it a wife, who sheds the blood of her husband. No, it is a Charybdis, a Scylla, a fury. Yet, with what artful tenderness did she receive him ! She appeared rejoiced at his return. Ah, it was the sight only of her victim that caused her transport. My predictions will not be believed here, no more than they were at Troy ; but the event will soon prove them true.”

The old men, although terrified, yet pretend not to understand so clear a prophecy. Cassandra tells them plainly, “ You will soon see the death of Agamemnon.” Who will the assassin be ? says the Chorus. Cassandra replies, “ that they might have discovered who, from what she had said.” She begins then a third time to be agitated with her prophetic demon. This scene is very animated and interesting ; for in proportion as Clytemnestra proceeds in her intended crime behind the scene, Cassandra points it out, if we may use the expression, to the eyes of the spectators, through the veil of divination, and in the raptures of prophetic fury. “ Oh Apollo, cries she again, what new rage inspires me ! a lioness, in concert with a wolf, rob me of life. I was her pretence for murdering her husband, and I am in my turn her victim.”

Cassandra, seeing her death determined, throws away her crown and sceptre, the symbols of prophets. She renders back

to Phœbus all his gifts : she fancies the God has stript her of her robe, and that he now takes vengeance for his slighted passion.
 " But I shall likewise be revenged, says she. A day will come
 " when the son shall wash away the infamy of his father's death
 " and mine in a mother's blood. (She speaks of Orestes, who af-
 " terwards killed Clytemnestra.) Why then is my destiny lament-
 " ed ? I have seen Ilion perish : I have seen her destroyers perish:
 " shall I want courage to meet my death ? no, I fly to it."

The Chorus admire her fortitude, and endeavour to retain her. Cassandra, as she is upon the point of entering the palace, stops and hesitates. " This house, says she, breathes of slaughter." Yet she fixes herself in her purpose. " Adieu, O strangers, says she ; " I have lived long enough." She quits them, after presenting them gifts, to remind them afterwards of the truth of her predictions, and after offering a pathetic prayer to the sun to revenge her murder.

The old men, still incredulous, cannot imagine it possible that what they have heard should happen ; but they are soon convinced of the unhappy certainty. They hear the lamentable cries of Agamemnon, who is murdered behind the scenes. He complains, that they have the barbarity to redouble their stabs. The Chorus, of which there are two speakers here, terrified and amazed, are divided in their opinions concerning what resolution is proper to be taken in the present conjuncture. However, they soon determine to enter the palace by force; but Clytemnestra suddenly comes out to meet them, with the audacious and brutal air of a woman who had long resolved upon her crime, and had executed it with deliberate cruelty. She is the Cleopatra of Corneille. Far from blushing at her impious treason, she boasts of having killed her husband, and calmly relates the manner in which she accomplished her parricide, shewing her hands still stained with the blood she had so lately shed. The palace-gates are opened, and the body of Agamemnon is seen. Clytemnestra expects that the people should applaud her for the deed, and gives herself little concern about those who condemn it. " Agamemnon, (says she) has drank of " the cup which he himself had filled with miseries and horror.— " Yes, my husband died by this hand, and justice guided it."

The Chorus treat her as an impious woman, who ought to be punished with banishment at least. But she reproaches herself with not having banished her husband immediately after the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Such is the cause Clytemnestra alledges for this

murder ; besides, she is supported by Egisthus. Hence arises her security, which animates her to defy the people, and to triumph with the utmost haughtiness in the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra : for she had also sacrificed this princess, under pretence that she was her rival.

The grief of the Chorus, who speak with great dignity to the execrable queen, and the pride and insolence of this queen, who confidently maintains, that her husband merited his fate, are admirably expressed. “ Oh, thou earth ! cries one of the old men, “ why was I not swallowed up in thy bosom, ere I beheld my “ king, the great, the powerful Agamemnon, reduced to a vile “ tomb ?---But ah, who will give him funeral rites ? who will “ mourn him ? Not thou, unhuman woman, who hast murder- “ ed him. This care belongs not to you, replies Clytemnestra. “ We have sacrificed him : we will give him a tomb ; and, if we “ do not pay him the accustomed tribute of tears, yet at least his “ daughter Iphigenia shall meet him on the borders of the stream “ of sorrow, and welcome him with tender embraces.” Here we see she adds the most bitter scoffs to a crime the most atrocious, as the Chorus justly reproach her.

At length Egisthus also appears, and in the same manner boasts of what he has done. He declares, that he has revenged his father Thyestes, who had uttered imprecations against the Pelopides, because Atreus had made him eat the flesh of his own children. The Chorus speak to him with the same firmness and resolution, as they had before done to Clytemnestra ; they threaten him with the rage of the people ; they reproach him with his baseness, in making use of the hands of a woman to kill her husband ; and predict to the usurper, that Orestes will one day punish the lover and his impious mistress. This seditious language, which produces no consequences, shew at once the boldness of the subjects in that age, and the power of the kings or tyrants, who despised it. Egisthus, as a tyrant, appears to be mortified ; but answers only with vain boasts. The old men cry out, call the people to their assistance, and seem resolved to raise an insurrection. Clytemnestra, calm and composed in the midst of her guilt, exhorts her lover to despise these idle clamours ; and all retire.

This tragedy was crowned, and at that time merited to be so. The passions are there carried to the greatest height, as well in the pathetic scene of Cassandra as in all that follows. The first acts

acts seem to languish, and are less interesting than the others. But they lead to the great end the poet has in view: they prepare us for the succeeding incidents, and produce suspensions, which never fail of having a fine effect. In this play, guilt is only punished by the revolt and the predictions of the Chorus: but this is sufficient for those who know the preceding part of the history. The revenge taken by Orestes upon Egisthus and Clytemnestra, his frenzy, and his re-establishment upon the throne of his father, are the subjects of two other tragedies, which follow this. We have seen the former under the title of the *Coepbores*, in the first part of this work. We shall take notice of the second, after we have examined the Agamemnon of Seneca.

T H E
A G A M E M N O N
O F
S E N E C A.

A C T I.

THE shade of Thyestis, who rises from hell, speaks the prologue, or opens the scene. He appears only to declare, in express terms, what is to happen ; that is, the murder of Agamemnon, and thus takes away all the pleasure of the surprize ; which shews how greatly inferior the art of the Latin poet is to that of the Grecian. It must be confessed, indeed, that Thyestes speaks very fine verses ; that he marks the place where the scene is laid with great propriety ; that he recounts all the horrid crimes committed by his family, in a manner which raises horror in the spectators, and concludes at length with this beautiful verse :

“ Phœbum moramur. Redde jam mundo diem.”

“ My presence stops the sun. I disappear, and Apollo restores light to the world.” But this cannot excuse the defect of anticipating the events, and by that means depriving the audience of the chief pleasure of the representation.

The Chorus of Argives enter immediately after Thyestes is descended to the shades. They give us a fine moral upon the dangers and cares with which kings are surrounded, and the inestimable happiness of a private condition.

“ Metui cupiunt, metuique timent.”

“ Kings wish to be feared, and dread to be so.” It is a series of just and shining sentiments. But to what does all this amount ? Yet here is a whole act. It is necessary to observe, that the Chorus of this poet has no resemblance to that of the Greeks ; but in the measure of the verses differing from that of recitation, and that he does not divide them into Strophes, to be sung by the Chorus in two parts, as they do. Thus he has embarrassed himself with all the incon-

inconveniences of the Chorus, without knowing the advantages of them ; or rather he is at little pains with either the one or the other, and his Choruses are almost always interludes that do not depend upon the poem.

ACT II.

Clytemnestra, upon the report of her husband's return from Troy, enters, and exhorts herself to complete her infidelity and her crimes, to suppress all remains of remorse, and to kill Agamemnon.

" *Per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter.*"

Nothing can be more in the spirit true of tragedy than this beginning. She proposes to surpass all women in guilt. " But no, cries she, let us " fly with our lover." " Ah, resumes she immediately afterwards, " thy sister * has done that : a greater crime is worthy of thee."

" *Soror ista fecit ; te decet majus nefas.*"

Clytemnestra's nurse, agreeably to the Greek manners, asks her mistress the cause of her uneasiness; who tells her, that tormented at once by guilt and remorse, she is resolved to have now no other guides but her passions. The confident beseeches her to conceal her adultery at least; and here follows a conflict of sentiments, which is not without its beauty. This is the manner of Seneca. The queen, enraged at the remembrance of her daughter sacrificed at Aulis, says,

" *Cruore ventos emimus, bellum nece.*"

And, among the pretences which she industriously seeks to justify her design of killing her husband, she charges him with having loved Briseis, and with his present passion for Cassandra, whom he is bringing to Argos. " Let us stab this perfidious wretch, says " she, and let us die, if it must be so, provided he dies ; death is " sweet, when our enemy falls with us."

" *Mors misera non est commori cum quo velis.*"

The same thought is in the Hercules on mount Oeta, ACT II.

" *Felix jacet quicumque quos odit premit.*"

The confident endeavours to dissuade the queen from this attempt by fear, by the horrors that must attend such a crime, and by the strongest arguments her imagination can furnish her with ; after which she retires at the approach of Egisthus.

* Helena.

not without beauty, but it is misplaced. Agamemnon has interests too important to settle with Egisthus and Clytemnestra to amuse himself here with Cassandra : a fault which Eschylus has avoided. The other scene of the Chorus of Argives, who resume their place, and which makes the whole act, is very short. It turns upon the praises of Argos, and the labours of Hercules : a strange subject it must be confessed.

ACT V.

Cassandra re-enters to declare plainly, that Agamemnon is seated at a feast, where he will soon lose his life by the hands of Egisthus and Clytemnestra. She goes farther. The murder is perpetrated ; and she describes it without seeing it. This recital is full of spirit ; but Cassandra triumphs too much at seeing Troy thus fatally revenged. She is more moderate in Eschylus, and her predictions are heard with equal incredulity.

Electra, in amazement and terror, comes out of the palace with the young Orestes, whom she saves from death, that he may one day revenge the murder of his father. Strophius, as if the word had been given him, arrives at that instant with his son Pylades. Electra confides her brother to him ; and he receives the child, with this sentence :

“ Poscunt fidem secunda, at adversa exigunt.”

He then carries him to his chariot, while Electra neither thinks of following him, nor of providing for her own security.

Clytemnestra now appears, stained with the blood of her husband ; and perceiving Cassandra with Electra at the neighbouring altar, she exclaims furiously against the latter, and demands Orestes from her. “ Restore me my son, says she :” “ And do you restore me my father, answers Electra.” She steps forward to meet her barbarous mother, and offers her bosom to the stroke of death. Egisthus joins Clytemnestra to repress the reproaches of Electra, and upon his threatening this princess with slavery, she cries out, “ Give me death.” “ I would give it thee, replies Egisthus, if thou didst not ask it.” Such is the taste of Seneca ; that is, of his age. It would be beautiful, if it was not carried too far. The antithesis is almost every where predominate, and nature laid aside. The play concludes with a command given by the queen to poison Electra, and to put Cassandra to instant death.

This piece, in the judgment of the critics, can be ranked only in the second order of the tragedies attributed to Seneca ; that is, it has more of the poet than the philosopher in it.

THE EUMENIDES:

A

TRAGEDY BY ESCHYLUS.

THE play which bears this title is so very extravagant, that I do not think myself obliged to enter into a strict examination of it: yet I shall say enough to give the reader a just idea of it, that I may not be thought partial to Eschylus, by pointing out his beauties only.

The subject of the Eumenides is a continuation of the *Coephores*. Orestes, after having killed his mother, is possessed by the Furies, who torment him incessantly. Apollo, to deliver him from them, advises him to go to Athens, and implore the aid of Minerva. The Deity transports him thither himself. Orestes submits to the judgment of the Areopagus, and is absolved by Minerva. Such is the subject in general: when we enter into the detail, we shall find in it the origin and practice of a law of the Areopagus in favour of criminals. This tribunal received its name from the God Mars, who, we are told by Pausanias, was the first who was tried by it. It was a long time afterwards that Orestes was judged there, under the reign of Demophoon king of Athens, as we learn from the marbles of Arundel, and not under Pandion, as is asserted by the scholiast of Aristophanes upon the *Wasps*.

ACT I.

The unity of place is not observed in this play: for the scene is first laid in Delphos. But this is not what shocks us most, as we shall soon find. Orestes is supposed to be in the temple of Apollo at Delphos. An old Pythoness opens the scene, with a prayer to all the Gods of divination. This is a little tedious, but it is a just representation of the ceremonies of these prophetesses. She seats herself on her tripod, as being ready to pronounce oracles to the Greeks assembled in the temple: a spectacle more striking than the verses. In the back part of the scene, and probably in the

vestibule of the temple, she perceives Orestes surrounded by the Furies, who are charmed asleep by Apollo. She gives a horrible description of them; and indeed the figure they make must needs be very hideous, since it is related, that when these Furies awaked, and appeared in a tumultuous manner upon the stage, where they performed the office of the Chorus, some pregnant women miscarried with the surprize, and several children died of the fright. At that time the Chorus consisted of fifty actors: after this accident the number was reduced to fifteen by an express law, and afterwards to twelve.

The prophetess, therefore, explains the subject very naturally. She points to Orestes at a distance, (who does not appear yet) and describes him as in the habit of a suppliant, his head bound with a large bandage of black linen, in one hand holding a branch of olive, and a sword still bloody in the other. At length she leaves the care of him to Apollo, who now appears with Orestes.

The God assures him, that he will not abandon him; and that he will deliver him from the persecution of the Furies. He commands him to take advantage of the interval they afford him, to take refuge in Athens, where he will perform his promise, and rescue him out of their hands; for it was I, adds he, who incited thee to kill Clytemnestra. Orestes, after a short prayer to Phœbus, retires, and Apollo intreats Mercury to conduct this fugitive, whom he has taken under his protection, safely to Athens.

Scarce are Apollo and Orestes gone off the stage, when the shade of Clytemnestra rises out of the earth: so fruitful is this tragedy in spectres. She calls the Furies with a loud voice to rouze them from their sleep: probably they lye extended on the stage. The shade complains of being neglected among the numerous dead, without vengeance, without any resource against a son who murdered his mother, while she was severely punished for having procured the death of her husband. She shews them the wounds which she received from Orestes, and reproaches them with their slowness in revenging her. Was this the reward of so many sacrifices which she has offered them? "What, says she, do you sleep, "while your prisoner, like a fawn, is escaped out of your hands."

What follows is indeed surprising. The whole Chorus, or else the principal fury, answers only by snoring repeatedly, which the author has very exactly marked, sometimes more or less loud, and in different tones, which makes it probable that the instruments express

express these sounds *, as they expressed the groans and tears in certain other Chorusses; as for example, in the tragedy of *The Persians*. Yet, whatever grace they might give to this snoring of the Furies, it will be readily allowed, that there is something very ridiculous in it; at least it will appear so in our age, although we have operas wherein laughter is put in rhyme, and set to music †. After some farther importunities from the shade of Clytemnestra, the principal Fury begins to rouze from her slumber, uttering a cry, as if she was pursuing a wild beast at the chace. At length she awakes, and wakens her companions also; who are astonished to find that their prey has escaped them. They lay the fault upon Apollo; and are very much mortified that a young Deity should have imposed upon so many ancient Divinities.

ACT II.

Apollo appears, and with an angry air commands them to quit his temple, upon pain of being peirced by his arrows, so as to render back from their wounds all the human blood on which they have feasted. He bids them fly to those parts of Greece, where the most enormous crimes are committed; where murder stalks hideous; where vengeance tears away the bleeding eye-balls; where rage stings mortals to death, impales them, and practises all sorts of cruelties. "These, says he, are your usual repasts. The den of "a blood-thirsty lion ought to be your retreat, and not this temple "of oracles." However, upon the Eumenides reproaching him with favouring an impious son, who has murdered his mother, he exculpates himself as well as he can in a few words, and refers them to the sentence of Minerva. They leave him, fully determined to prosecute Orestes; and he resolves to defend him.

ACT III.

All on a sudden the scene is changed, and Delphos becomes Athens. Orestes is seen prostrate before the statue of Minerva, to whom he offers up a short and moving prayer. The Eumenides, who, as Goddesses, can over-run the whole earth in an instant, appear close by him, and discover their prisoner by the scent of the maternal blood which he has shed. They declare to him, that they will long drink of his, without giving him the consolation to

* The same thing may be supposed with regard to the croaking of frogs, and the whistling of the birds in Aristophanes, in the third part of this work.

† Oh, qu'il est beau, ho, ho, ho!

Qu'il est joli, hi, hi, hi, &c.

Fête de l'amour & de Bacchus, A& II. Scene II.

die, and that at length they will deliver him up to Pluto, that God so dreadful to the wicked. Orestes cries, that he has been purified in the temple of Delphos, by the blood of victims shed in sacrifice for him, and still more by time, which effaces all crimes. He tells them that he has just invoked Minerva, and offered her his arm, his sceptre, and his sword. The Eumenides repeat, that he is devoted to them; and that neither Minerva nor Apollo shall shield him from their tortures. In sign of their joy for having found him, they surround him, singing a magical and infernal ode. This kind of hymn, full of the fire of Eschylus, inspires a nameless horror. Many of the couplets conclude with a burden, which shew that this song is a song of the Furies, a song which fetters guilty mortals, and withers them with fear. All they say tends to prove, that they are the executioners of justice.

A C T IV.

Minerva descends majestically into her temple. She sees Orestes kneeling before her statue, and the Furies who surround him. "What is it you demand, says she to them, you who resemble neither the Gods nor mortals?" The Furies make themselves known to the Goddess, and urge their claim to torment Orestes; but finding her determined not to condemn the prince, without hearing his defence, they consent that she shall be the arbitrator between them and him.

Orestes begins his defence, by declaring, that he was purified before he touched the statue, which he holds embraced: he then relates his history in few words; he confesses the fact charged upon him, but justifies it by the command of Apollo: he puts his cause into the hands of Minerva, provided she will take him under her protection, and desires he may be tried by chosen Athenians, who will swear to pronounce an equitable sentence. Such, according to Eschylus, is the origin of the proceedings of the Areopagus in criminal cases.

Minerva goes out of the temple with Orestes; but the Chorus, dissatisfied with the beginning of a process in which they see their victim forced from them, complain bitterly of this supposed injustice. "If this assassin escapes us, cry the Eumenides, all laws are overthrown. Mortals will grow bold in guilt; and how many mothers may suffer the fate of Clytemnestra! --- Who will hence forwards invoke our power! what injured wretch will cry, oh justice, oh throne of the furies!" All the rest turns upon this.

moral,

moral, which is sung by the Chorus, and fills up the interval of this act.

ACT V.

Minerva appears again at the head of the judges chosen by herself. She commands the herald to sound the trumpet for the people, who are supposed to be present, to keep silence. Apollo follows her, and undertakes the defence of the accused. Although this may appear to the readers to have a certain ridiculous air, which brings to remembrance the comedy of the lawyers, yet it is a very serious action, as well as the pleading of Horatius before Tullus.

Minerva opens the cause; and the principal Fury begins to speak, not in a continued harangue, but in regular interrogations, which she puts to the accused, upon the fact; he confesses it; upon the manner; he explains it: upon the author of the design; it is Apollo.

Orestes interrogates the Fury in his turn. "Why, says he, didst thou not punish Clytemnestra after she had murdered her husband?" "She was not connected with him by the ties of blood," answers the Fury.

The facts thus stated and acknowledged on both sides, Apollo rises up, and, in justification of Orestes, declares, that it was he who commanded him to put his mother to death; but adds, that all his oracles are the decrees of Jupiter himself. "What, replies the Fury, was it by the inspiration of Jupiter, that thou didst command him to revenge the death of his father by the murder of his mother?" "Yes, says the God; for the death of an hero and a king ought to be considered differently from that of an impious wife." And to move the people in favour of the accused, he relates the horrible manner in which Clytemnestra murdered her husband and her king: "A king, unhappy in having escaped death before the walls of Troy, to fall ignominiously at home." This is the speech of a lawyer, who seeks to move the passions of the judges in favour of his client.

Here the Fury urges a small objection, which carries with it some impiety. "How! says she, does Jupiter, who threw his father Saturn into chains, condemn a queen for entangling her husband in a robe, that she might give him the stroke of death!" Apollo refutes this objection, by shewing the extreme difference between binding a Deity and murdering a king. They insist upon the quality of a mother so sacred among mortals, that all those who attempt the lives of their parents are held guilty of parricide.

He.

He extricates himself from this difficulty by a very singular distinction, but which is received among the other Greek tragedians, who have wrote on the same subject. The father, he says, is the true author of life to the child, and not the mother; who is no more than the depositary of it. He takes Minerva herself to witness, who, without any mother, issued out of the brain of Jupiter. He concludes, by promising Minerva, that if she preserves Orestes, that prince and his posterity shall be always the faithful friends of the Athenians, and the alliance between them shall never be dissolved. This is a stroke of state-policy, which Eschylus had his reasons for introducing here. He looks upon the Argives as the subjects of Orestes. Almost all the ancient tragedies are full of the like allusions, the application of which is concealed from us. We shall be more successful in explaining those of Aristophanes.

Minerva commands that they should proceed to collect the suffrages; that is, that they should put the black stones into an urn, in the manner of the Areopagites. During this interval, in which each of the judges gives his suffrage for or against the accused, she pronounces the law, which she intends shall be observed in the trials of criminals: for this is the first institution of the judges of the Areopagus. "It is my will, says she, that this Areopagus, "this place which takes its name from Mars, and which was formerly the camp of the Amazons, when they made war upon Theseus, shall preserve the majesty of justice, to prevent the commission of crimes among my people. Hence forward no new laws shall be admitted: mine will be polluted by them, as water is polluted by the mixture of any foreign matter. Let my laws reign over you, and hold the place of a monarch. It is fear only that impels mortals to be just. Maintain this tribunal, then, as the strongest bulwark of your country: a tribunal which no other people can boast; wise, disinterested, ready to punish guilt, and attentive to the welfare of the citizens. Such is the establishment I have made for my favourite nation."

The Eumenides perceiving they were likely to lose the cause, the Coryphaeus, or principal Fury, throws out some malignant reflexions, to intimidate the judges. Apollo answers her; and both express perfectly well the animosity of two lawyers on different sides, while the sentence is depending. Mean time Minerva gives her voice for Orestes, and assigns as a reason for it, that not having had a mother, she is but little concerned in the murder of Clytemnestra,

con-

considered as a mother. She immediately commands the white and black stones to be produced. " Oh Apollo, cries Orestes, what " will be the event of this cause?" The Fury, being equally uncertain of success, exclaims in the same manner, and Apollo commands that the suffrages should be counted with great exactness, because the mistake of one, more or less, might be the occasion of the ruin or re-establishment of whole families. These, it is plain, are so many hints for the courts of justice in the age of Eschylus, and in all ages. The number of the black and white stones are found to be equal; therefore Orestes is absolved.

Hereupon the prince, addressing himself to Minerva, " Oh Pal-
" las, says he, oh tutelary Divinity, it is thou who restorest me to
" my country! Yes, the Greeks at my return shall declare it. It
" is by the assistance of Minerva, Apollo, and Jupiter, who
" espoused the interests of Agamemnon, that Orestes reascends
" the throne of his father. But before I ascend this throne, I
" swear to preserve an eternal alliance with this state. (Eschylus
" here intends to shew the union between the Argives and the
" Athenians.) I swear that no Argive shall make war on Athens:
" if after my death any of my descendants shall dare to violate the
" solemn oath I have made, I denounce inevitable misfortunes to
" him; I will render Athens inaccessible to his approaches,
" and from the bottom of my tomb will make him repent of
" his rash undertaking: but to those who honour Athens, and
" faithfully observe the alliance I have sworn, I will be ever fa-
" vorable." After this speech Orestes retires, and leaves the
Furies to vent their rage in complaints.

Minerva endeavours to appease them, by representing, that if Orestes is preserved, their honour is also safe; and that he has been rather pardoned than absolved, since the suffrages were found equal. She intreats them not to resign themselves up to their rage, nor to execute their threats of laying Athens waste. At length she promises them divine honours and altars in the city. The Chorus still irritated, repeat their complaints and invectives. They are Furies incensed against their judges. Minerva continues to intreat them, but with dignity, and mixes gentleness with authority. In this she imitates the conduct of Jupiter to Phœbus, when that Deity, enraged that Phaeton, his son, was struck dead with thunder, refused to give light to the world,

" Precibusque minas regaliter addit."

She afterwards endeavours to persuade them to receive the homage
and

and worship of the Athenians. Some passion may be allowed to break out in the first moments; but men must be recalled by reason to gentler resolutions.

This scene, if you make allowances for the matter, is, with respect to the passion, well conducted. The Eumenides are constrained to yield to the sweet, yet powerful eloquence of the Goddess. They propose their conditions; and Minerva promises them, that a temple shall be built to their honour, (it was that which was still standing in the time of Eschylus) and that no family should be prosperous but by their consent. They, in their turn, make vows propitious to Athens, and are received among the Goddesses of the country at Minerva's command. This ceremony is performed by a number of young girls and women of all ages, who conduct the newly adopted Divinities to the place destined for their reception.

It will be readily acknowledged, that the rude, and in some degree, gross strokes in this piece, are very opposite to our taste, and even to that of dramatic poetry. But among these we must not confound such as immediately regard the manners and notions of the Greeks. The snoring of the Furies, and that spectacle of hideous monsters, are absurd. Yet, as these were Divinities revered by the Greeks, they viewed them with other eyes than we do: and they had still a stronger reason for being less shocked than we are, to find Apollo pleading for Orestes, and Minerva acting such a part as Eschylus has given her. All this was suitable to their ideas; and it is necessary that we approach to them as near as we can, that we may not consider as ridiculous a tragedy which we know to have interested the most polite people of the universe.

T H E
S U P P L I A N T S.

A

T R A G E D Y O F E S C H Y L U S.

THIS also is one of those tragedies composed by Eschylus, remarkable for the extreme simplicity of its fable. It is the last of his which we have remaining. Danaus reigned with his brother Egyptus over Egypt. Egyptus made himself sole master of the kingdom, and obliged his brother to submit to his government. The usurper had fifty sons, and Danaus as many daughters. Egyptus was desirous of marrying his sons to their cousin-germans; but the Danaides were so terrified at the proposal, that they fled to Argos, with their father Danaus, to avoid a marriage which they looked upon as impious. Argos was indeed, in some respect, their native country, since the family of Danaus was descended from Io, who was an Argive. It was on this circumstance they founded their hopes of being protected in that country. Pelasgus, the son of Palecthon, was then king of Argos. He thought it inhuman to reject the prayers of these illustrious suppliants, and, at the same time, dangerous to receive them under his protection. Egyptus, it was probable, would make war upon him, and Pelasgus, as a good king, was contented with governing his little territory, and unwilling to engage himself in the troubles of other kingdoms. His deliberation upon this affair makes the subject of the tragedy which we are now to consider. The history of Danaus and Egyptus appears to be very different here, from that related by the other poets. According to them, Danaus, after reigning nine years jointly with his brother in Egypt, was dethroned, persecuted, and constrained to take refuge in Argos, where he founded the kingdom so called: yet he consented to the marriage of his fifty daughters with the fifty sons of his brother; but secretly conditioned with the princesses, that each of them should conceal

a poinard under her robe, and with it murder her husband on the nuptial night. This scheme, they say, was executed; only Hypermnestra spared her husband Lynceus, who afterwards succeeded Danaus in the kingdom of Argos. Eschylus has not taken in all these events, yet he contrives to make them follow the history he has treated, and to which he confines himself in this tragedy. In the editions of it, which are come down to us, the persons of the drama are not exact. There is one inserted in the list which does not seem to have any business in the piece itself. It is an old man. It is plain that he is a useless person, and to him is given very improperly some of those speeches which belong to the character of Danaus, as it is easy to discover by reading that scene. The king of Argos is the second person: a herald, and the Chorus, composed of the daughters of Danaus, are the rest of the characters. The scene is laid upon the sea-shore, near the lists where the public games were celebrated, and the statues of the Divinities who presided at those games are represented there.

ACT I.

Eschylus, who was fond of surprising his audience at first with grand and magnificent spectacles, here shews several ships sailing up to the shore. The Danaides land with their father at their head, and their attendants following. She who speaks for all the rest, offers up a prayer to Jupiter to be propitious to them; and thus very naturally explains the occasion of their flight, and the subject of the tragedy. Their father is the author of the resolution they have taken; he is the head of the enterprize, and the companion of their exile. These are hymns of execration to the Gods to whom they fly, and the Argolic regions their original country, where they ardently desired to conclude their travels. “ Oh city, “ oh country, oh Gods, protectors of innocence, receive your “ fearful suppliants, and bury the sons of Egyptus in the sea, rather than permit such marriages as are detestable to you !”

It must be here observed, that as they come in the character of suppliants to seek an asylum among strangers, they bear symbols conformable to their condition; namely, olive-branches wreathed round with linen. All this first act, which begins with the Chorus, as well as many more of the dramatic pieces of the ancients, consists of little more than an abridged exposition, such as we have already mentioned. Eschylus gives this exposition in forty verses, with an energy of thought and expression which it is impossible to imitate

imitate. The accustomed song, which is here of a great length, fills up the remainder of the act : it contains only repeated invocations of the Gods of the country by the Danaides, and a lively representation of their misfortunes. They begin with imploring the aid of Io, who had been changed into a heifer by Jupiter, and afterwards of Epaphus, her son, from whom they derive their origin. They compare themselves to the plaintive Philomela, a favourite comparison with Eschylus and the other tragic poets of the Greeks. They resume the praises of the Gods, particularly of Jupiter, by whom, they say, all things were made, which proves, that the Greeks had often very just notions of the Divinity. " Oh Gods, " the authors of our race, deign to hear our just petitions, and " reject those of our impious persecutors. Mars himself bestows " on those who escape from battle a shelter reverenced by the " Gods. To Jupiter we owe an undivided heart : his ways are im- " penetrable : his rays illuminate every place, and darkness with " him is light ; yet are not the various accidents of life less hid " from us. He nods his awful head, and his decrees are execut- " ed. He from the Heaven of Heavens beholds the impious."

All that is here said by the Danaides express in the most lively manner imaginable, as well the vows they make to avoid the sons of Egyptus, as the horror they have to an alliance with them : for they resolve, if neither Gods nor men will have pity on them, and protect them against the violence with which they are threatened, that they will have recourse to death, and seek in the shades that asylum which was denied them on earth.

A C T II.

After these pathetick invocations, Danaus tells his daughters, that it is now time to consider in what manner they shall address the Argives. He perceives at a distance a cloud of dust, and by degrees discovers that it is occasioned by a body of armed men. Immediately he hears the sound of chariots. We shall soon, says he, be environed with a whole nation, who either come with benevolent intentions, to inquire into the cause of our arrival, or else with a design to put us to death. He therefore advises his daughters to place themselves near a group of statues, which he knows to be those of the Divinities that preside over the public sports. " An " altar, says he, is a fafer bulwark than towers. It is a buckler " which cannot be peirced. Take these olive-branches, so favour- " ed by Jupiter ; crown them with white fillets : bear them in

" your hands with religious awe, and speak with that humility
 " which is becoming to strangers. Yet you may freely declare,
 " that your flight is not criminal, and that your hands are not pol-
 " luted with blood. Let your words, your looks, and your whole
 " air, breath modesty and gentleness. Take care that you do not
 " begin first, or make long speeches : nothing is more odious.
 " Remember to be submissive and complaisant. You are strangers;
 " you come to implore protection : in such a situation, to raise
 " your voices, and to speak with confidence, suit not you."

The Danaides, like trembling doves at the sight of the vulture, as Eschylus describes them, instantly fly to the protection of the altars, where they invoke the Deities revered there, Jupiter, Apollo, Neptune, and Mercury.

A C T III.

Mean time the cloud disperses, the little army approaches, and Pelasgus appears surrounded with the principal Argives his subjects. He accosts the Danaides, enquires the name of their country, and the meaning of those symbols which they bear in their hands. He tells them, in answer to their questions, that he is king of Argos ; he describes his dominions, and names his predecessors, almost in the same manner as Homer's heroes in the Iliad. This shews us the manner of the ancients ; but we cannot excuse it, either through judgment or caprice, on their side or ours. After this short narration, he requires them, in their turn, to give him a faithful and succinct account of their situation and their design. They declare, that they are Argives by descent ; and Pelasgus, by frequent questions, obliges them to relate particularly, how they trace back their origin to Io, what was the adventures of the daughter of Inachus, and in what manner she arrived at Memphis ? The Danaides add, that Io brought Epaphus into the world ; that Epaphus was the father of Belus, and Danaus ; their father, was the son of Belus. They then proceed to the true cause of their voyage from Egypt to Argos, which is the fear of being compelled to wed their cousin-germans ; and they implore the protection of Pelasgus against the violence of their lovers. " Respect, say they, " these branches with which we have crowned the altars of thy " Gods. Respect Jupiter, who espouses the cause of suppliants." All the remaining part of these supplications is very beautiful and affecting.

But Pelasgus is greatly perplexed. Shall he give an asylum to these unfortunate princesses ? That will be to expose his people to

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an unavoidable war, against princes formidable by their numerous forces, and still more by the rage of slighted love. Shall he reject the prayers of suppliants, so sacred among mankind? His heart cannot consent to such cruelty, which would draw upon him the vengeance of the Gods *, with which they threaten him, in case he refuses them his protection. Every motive of religion that enforces the practice of humanity, had great efficacy with the ancient pagans. With them, to violate the laws of hospitality, to deny suppliants, who had no other arms than their distress, humble intreaties, and branches of olives, were crimes which attacked the Divinity himself. Natural religion, although disfigured by superstition, reigned among them in all its force, and made religious duties of those prescribed by humanity. This irresolution of Pelasgus is the hinge upon which the whole simple fable of this tragedy turns; and whoever will be at the pains to examine it without prejudice, must acknowledge, that the situation of the Danaides persecuted by their ravishers, and that of the king of Argos, considering them with respect to their age, and to an Athenian audience, were happily contrived to move the passions, and were suited to their ideas and interests of state. This scene is very long, but full of nature, and as interesting to them, as it is cold and indifferent to us. In proportion as the suppliants press the king, he feels himself agitated by two different emotions: one arises from compassion towards persons in distress, or rather from a sentiment of religion, which requires him to relieve them: the other from policy, the interests of his kingdom being concerned; so that sometimes he resolves as a king, sometimes as a man. Now he rejects the prayer of the Danaides, and now he comforts them with hope, still fluctuating between policy and compassion.

The resolution he fixes on at last, is to go and consult the people, and either to grant or refuse his protection to the princesses as they shall determine. In vain do the Danaides attempt to move him by the affecting eloquence of their tears. He is contented with consoling them; but will do nothing of himself. In a word, he refers them to the determination of the people, yet not without suffering greatly from his tenderness and compassion. For the princesses, thus left by him in uncertainty, declare, that if he has the barba-

* " To injure suppliants (says Plato, in his fifth book of laws) is the most atrocious crime that can be committed against

" strangers or citizens. God himself is their

" guard and revenger."

rity to refuse them his protection, they will, as their last resource, find an asylum in a voluntary death. An odious circumstance for the Athenians. This is expressed with great simplicity. "Dost thou know, say they, to what we will have recourse?" They leave the king to guess their design; afterwards they shew him their girdles, telling him, that they will make a new ornament for those Deities, whom they have already adorned with their fillets: and what ornaments? they intend to hang themselves on the statues. In that age, this was the method of suicide; and may appear ridiculous to such as will not enter into the manners of antiquity, as well as the deaths of Jocasta and Phedra, who are both made to hang themselves, in Sophocles and Euripides. But why should this appear ridiculous? Every age and every country has its peculiarities; and besides, all consists in the manner of expressing things. How has Racine managed this circumstance, with regard to Monimia? He has been true to the history, and has ventured, before a French audience, to follow Plutarch, in shewing Monimia, resolved to make use of the royal fillet, to form the fatal knot that was to put an end to her life.

"*Et toi, fatal tissu, malheureux diadème,
Instrument & témoin de toutes mes douleurs, &c.*"

This is the very thing; or rather it is the thing no longer. The dignity of expression reconciles us to the picture which it draws. All depends upon the expression; it is by this that the secret has been found of making the ancients in a high degree venerable or contemptible, though the first is less easy than the second: for the sublime borders nearly upon the ridiculous; and very often the majesty of an image, or the force of a thought, will raise our admiration, which being changed, by altering or displacing a few words, or a few accents of the voice, will make those burst with laughter, whom before it melted with tears. This seems to be the true art of parody. A burlesque imitation is more strongly felt, and more fully enjoyed, in proportion as the original has more real beauty and true greatness. Our self-love is unwilling to grant applause, and gladly compensates the pain of praise, by the pleasure of derision. This thought would carry us too far, if we were to apply it to the ancients. Let us then go on with the scheme of the *Suppliants*.

Pelaigus, thrown into a new perplexity by the intreaties of Danaus, to secure him an asylum at least, determines to send him into the

the city, escorted by some of his troops. "Follow me, says he, "old man, thou who art the father of these princesses, come, and bear these branches to all the altars in the city, that the whole people may know of thy arrival, and the protection thou hast solicited of us. Thus shall I prevent their murmurs against my conduct: for the people are ever ready to blame the actions of their sovereigns. Perhaps the hatred the citizens will necessarily entertain against the unjustlovers of the princesses will be improved into compassion for their misfortunes." Danaus departs, and the king removes the fears of the Danaides, by assuring them, that he will omit nothing to secure them against the violence they are apprehensive of.

Meantime, knowing that Egyptus and his are sent in pursuit of them, they offer up a thousand prayers to heaven, to prevent the consequences of it. They recal to remembrance the wanderings of Io, her adventures, and the loves of Jupiter. His former passion for Io gives new energy to their prayers, and animates their hopes. Will this Deity abandon princesses, who are descended from her he loved? They repeat those praises of Jupiter, which I have already mentioned. He, they say, is the author and disposer of all things: his power he derives from himself alone; he knows no other sovereign: he with a single word does all that his wisdom suggests him to do. Such are the praises of the Divinity, with which this whole piece is filled, and this makes the third interlude.

ACT IV.

Danaus returns, and brings his daughters happy news. The people have listened to his intreaties, and by a decree, taken the suppliants under their protection. He relates to them the manner in which this was effected. "The Argives, says he, were not divided in their sentiments. The air resounded with their unanimous acclamations in our favour. We shall be received in Argos as free persons, who have a right to demand an asylum there. We shall not be conducted to the city as captives; and if Egyptus seeks to recover us, by making war upon Argos, the people require, that all those who refuse to assist her adopted citizens, shall be condemned to banishment as infamous. It was the king himself who inspired them with these favourable sentiments, and dictated the decree. He threatened them with the vengeance of Jupiter, the protector of suppliants. These branches, said he, which are upon our walls and gates, will "reproach

"reproach us with our barbarity, and prove an inexhaustible source of miseries to us, &c."

The Danaides, in acknowledgment of so signal a favour, sing in chorus a hymn full of happy wishes for the Argives, their benefactors. It was usual to make such vows when received into a foreign country. We see the same custom observed in the Eumenides. These Goddesses, when they accepted a temple in Attica, formed the same favourable wishes for the people. Those of the Danaides are the subject of a cantata, which might pass for a noble ode, in the manner of Pindar, and the ancient Hebrews, were it possible to preserve its beauty and grandeur in a translation. The following passages make part of it.

"Ye Gods, the offspring of great Jupiter, hear the prayers we offer up for this people. Oh, never may Mars, the cruel, the relentless Mars, who, like a reaper, mows down whole nations, consume the Argives with the flames of war, since in our distress we have found favour in the eyes of these citizens; since they have respected Jupiter's suppliants, never may Argos be depopulated by plagues, and her fields strewed with dead bodies; never may her youth be cut off like tender flowers! --- May the altars be always crowded with the reverend aged, to implore the assistance of Jupiter in the government of the state! And thou, oh Goddess, who presideſt over child-birth, be favourable to the Argive matrons, and give a race of princes to this country worthy to rule over her," &c.

The Chorus afterwards invoke Apollo in favour of the youth, the father of the Gods for the fertility of the land, the Muses and the Goddesses for public joy, &c.

These songs are interrupted by Danaus, who sees a vessel cutting the waves; he perceives the pavilion, and the ornaments of it, and the barks which follow it. In a word, he informs them, that the fleet of the enemy is approaching. He encourages his daughters, who tremble at the sight. Argos has declared for them, why should they fear their enemies? The contrast between the terror of these young girls, and the solicitude of the father to comfort and encourage them, makes the whole action of this scene. The father proposes to go to the city, and bring succours from thence: his daughters will not consent to his leaving them. The ships draw near; what can they do without him? how oppose those impious wretches, who will pay no regard to the sacred asylum where they have taken refuge.

"Calm these fears, resumes Danaus : the cautious foe neither
 "can nor dare land here immediately. We shall have time enough
 "to receive assistance. Do you implore the Gods, while I hasten
 "to inform the Argives of our enemies approach." He instantly
 takes his way to the city, and leaves the trembling princesses,
 who abandon themselves wholly to their fears : already they
 think themselves lost. Whither shall they fly ? where conceal
 themselves ? They would disperse, and vanish out of sight, like the
 smoke which mixes with the clouds ; but whatever happens, they
 will rather perish than marry their persecutors. They will become
 the prey of birds. Death appears less horrible to them than this
 detested marriage. In proportion as their enemies disembark, they
 redouble their cries and prayers.

A C T V.

While they are under this consternation and terror, a herald comes up to them, and, without any prelude, presses them to go on board the vessel. The Danaides cast forth lamentable cries, and the herald carries his insolence so far, as to threaten that he will drag them to the ship. They exclaim against this violence ; they load the cruel ravisher with imprecations, and attest the Gods, from whose protection he would force them. This impious herald will acknowledge no Grecian Divinities, he tells them. "Oh Ju-
 "piter, cry the Danaides, thy altars are to us a retreat as weak
 "and insecure as the nets of the vilest insects. Instead of being
 "our sanctuary, they aggravate our misfortunes. Oh earth, oh
 "thou common mother, resound with our distressful cries!"
 "Follow me, says the herald ; I know not the Gods of this coun-
 "try : it is not to them that I owe my life, and that old age to
 "which I have reached."

Pelasgus at this moment fortunately arrives with his whole court, followed by Danaus, and is a witness of the herald's violence, who has already seized one of the princesses by the hair ; and enraged at this insolence, "What art thou doing, says he to him ? How !
 "hast thou dared to offer such an insult to this country ?" The herald alleges that he has a right to act thus ; and that he only claims what belongs to his master. He denies that he violates the laws of hospitality, and complains, that those laws are violated with regard to him. "No, replies the king, I do not observe them
 "with such as contemn the Gods." "Well, resumes the herald,
 "speak thus to the sons of Egyptus." And he immediately declares war against him, if he refuses to deliver up the Danaides.

The king, with the concurrence of the principal citizens, declares, that the princesses were under his protection. He dismisses the herald with scorn, and commands him to carry back that answer to his master. "But do you, says he to the Danaides, "enter the city with your attendants; our towers will secure you "from the attempts of your ravishers." He leaves it to their choice, either to reside in his palace, or in some other mansion, where they will be retired, and in safety. The princesses, overwhelmed with so many instances of generosity, thank Pelasgus, and intreat him not to be displeased, if they refer the choice of their place of residence to Danaus their father. Danaus, after expressing his acknowledgment to the king and the citizens, who have just given him guards to secure him from any attempts of his enemies, leaves his daughters the liberty of accepting the king's offer of his palace for their residence, or that which is offered them by the citizens. But he particularly exhorts them to avoid giving the least stain to that virtue which they have so happily preserved from the impious passion of their lovers, that their enemies may not enjoy the malicious satisfaction of having any thing to reproach them with.

The Chorus answer as they ought to this paternal caution. Hence-forwards they will forget the shores of the Nile, and only celebrate in their songs those of Argos. They put themselves under the protection of the chaste Diana, and feel themselves capable of resisting all the attacks of love. But they cannot prevent some fears from rising in their mind, when they reflect on the war which threatens them. Here the Chorus divide into two Semichorusses, that is, one of the Danaides converses with the Coryphaeus upon the apprehensions of what may happen. "It is fate which "determines the future," says one of them. "The decrees of Ju- "piter are inevitable. But may the husbands, which we dread "so much fall to the lot of others, not to us!" "You pray for a " blessing," answers the other, "which it is not possible to obtain. "Let us not presume to penetrate into the secrets of the Gods." They conclude with conjuring the Gods to preserve them from a marriage which they detest.

It is highly probable, that Eschylus finishes his tragedy of the Suppliants in this manner, expressly to shew the audience, that he does not pretend to contradict a received history; since, in effect, the Danaides were constrained to marry the sons of Egyptus, and determined to murder them on the nuptial night.

The End of the Tragedies of Eschylus.



T H E

T R A G E D I E S

O F

S O P H O C L E S.



A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

ACCORDING to the unknown author of the life of Sophocles, that poet composed a hundred and seventeen, or a hundred and thirty tragedies, of which seven only have escaped the injury of time. Three of these tragedies are entirely translated in the first part of this work; namely, Oedipus, Electra, and Philoctetes. The four others, of which I shall here give the analysis, and indeed almost the whole translation, are the *Ajax distractèd*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colone*, and *The Trachiniae*. To the Antigone, I shall add a tragedy of Rotrou's on the same subject, and to the Trachiniae, the *Hercules dying*, of the same French author, with *The Hercules of Mount Oeta*, of Seneca. According to historical order, the plays of Sophocles are to be placed thus:

The TRACHINIAE.

King OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS at Colone.

ANTIGONE.

AJAX Distracted.

PHILOCTETES.

ELECTRA.

THE

T H E
T R A G E D I E S
O F
S O P H O C L E S.



A J A X distractèd.

THUS I translate the title of the first piece of Sophocles, because, if he was to live now, he would use it like the author of *Orlando Furioso*, and would make use of this word instead of the term *Whipper*: he would not now give his mad hero a name that offends the ear: he would banish the thing itself, and would no longer shew us Ajax with a whip in his hand, busied in lashing a ram, which he takes for Ulysses. But we must begin, by excusing the thing and the word, which gave no offence to the spectators for whom this poet wrote. After this warning, I will exhibit to the readers the spectacle of Ajax, such as Sophocles exhibited him to the Athenians, observing, once for all, that the decorums are preserved in this piece; that the mad acts of Ajax are always done behind the scenes, and never brought into public view.

Ajax and Ulysses, after Troy was taken, had a contention for the arms of Achilles. The relics of so great an hero were, in their eyes, a prize to which their actions gave them a claim; as if the possession of those arms would have been a sufficient testimony to either, that he inherited the qualities and the valour of Achilles. This dispute became a point of honour, and a question of state; and that of so great importance, that it was tried before the whole army of the Greeks. * Ovid has exerted all the facility and all the exuberance of his genius, in the pleas which he has assigned to each of the rival princes. It ended in a victory of eloquence over valour, in the preference of Ulysses to Ajax.

* Ovid. Metam. B. 13. v. 1.

** Mota

* “ Mota manus procerum est : & quid facundia posset
 “ Re patuit : fortisque viri tulit arma dissertus.”

This was an affront which Ajax could not digest. He felt from it so much vexation, that he lost his senses; and having resolved to wash away his disgrace in the blood of all the Grecian princes, he had a paroxism of rage, in which he slaughtered the flocks, and fancied he was cutting the throats of his judges. Among other animals, he brought into his tent a ram, which he called Ulysses, and, full of this notion, he several times let loose his fury upon his imaginary prisoner. At last, having returned to himself, and being vexed, not so much with the remembrance of his rage as with finding that his vengeance was visionary and ridiculous, he put an end to his own life.

Whether this be history or fable, it is at least the idea of Sophocles, to which we must confine ourselves: as well as in the subjects of other ancient tragedies, where we see that the poets gave themselves great liberties, founded on the different traditions concerning their heroes: for as these traditions did not agree with one another, they could chuse which they liked best, or could change very important facts, and yet not clash with public opinions.

I know that the Abbe d'Aubignac has written particularly upon this piece with great diligence and art, to shew that all the rules of the theatre are observed in it with the utmost nicety. He has evidently shewn, that the time and place are confined with great dexterity within the limits of probability and good sense; but with respect to the action, the question is not quite so clear. He has displayed the skilful manner with which Sophocles has introduced his incidents, the dexterity with which he has connected the scenes, and made his actors come and go naturally, and upon just occasions, has made the audience know them at their first entrance, has divided his acts judiciously, and marked the intervals of action with exactness, which are in Eschylus not perceived without much more difficulty. In short, the author of *The art of the stage* has left nothing undone, to shew that Ajax has all the beauties which are peculiar to a tragedy, considered as the representation of an action. But, without borrowing from him the reflections he has made upon the process of the theatrical action, which he has drawn up for those who have already read the piece, I will content myself with having it read in this book, and shall stop at the most remarkable passages, not doubting that the criticks will be able to

* Ovid. Metam. B. 13. v. 382.

see,

fee, without my help, the connection of events, and the art of the poet; so that it will not be necessary to dwell much upon them. The reflexions of *d'Aubignac* suppose the piece already known, and I lay it complete before the reader.

A C T I.

The subject of this play is partly explained by the scene only. It represents a camp, with a grove on one side, and on the other the shore, and the Grecian fleet before Ilion. Among the tents, one is distinguished from the rest by its superior size, and its being placed near the front of the stage. This is the tent of Ajax, before which the whole action is to pass.

Minerva, who is visible to the audience, but invisible to Ulysses, points out all this with great delicacy; and perceiving the prince, who is come there to make discoveries, and has his eyes fixed upon the pavilion of Ajax, "Tell me, says she to him, with "what design thou art come hither, and I will inform thee of "what thou desirest to know." Ulysses gives Minerva an account of what had happened in the night, how a great number of sheep were found slaughtered, and it was supposed that Ajax had done it in a frantic fit. But, as the matter was still doubtful, he was come himself to get more certain intelligence, and intreats Minerva, his tutelary Divinity, to assist him in making the discovery.

The Goddess tells him, that it was really Ajax who had killed the sheep; that in his frenzy he had taken them for the principal warriors in the army; and that he would certainly have satiated his vengeance upon them, if she had not taken care to deprive him of the use of his reason, and to give up those animals to his fury. But that Ulysses may have palpable proofs of this fury, she calls Ajax, and promises the king of Ithaca to conceal him so effectually from the view of his enemy, that he may see him without being seen. Here the two characteristics of Ulysses, timidity and prudence, are strongly marked; tho', to confess the truth, he shews himself a little cowardly, since, notwithstanding the precautions of his tutelary Goddess, he gives plain indications that he would rather be dispensed with from seeing Ajax. He adds, indeed, that Ajax is much less formidable to him when in his senses than thus agitated by madness: but, after all, he is very desirous of being assured that he is invisible; and it is not till he has received this assurance, that he consents to see the terrible Ajax: however, as he retires to the place where the Goddess directs him

to

to stand, he owns that he would much rather be farther off. This passage, is, I confess, not greatly to the praise either of Ulysses or Sophocles. But the character of the king of Ithaca was too well known to the spectators to admit of any palliations ; and at that time, the ideas of prudence and courage were very different from what they are at present.

Another fault, almost as inexcusable, if we have not recourse to allegory, and consequently to the extravagant part which the Greeks make their Deities act, is, that Minerva, who has deprived the unhappy Ajax of the use of his reason, calmly and deliberately imposes upon him, by pretending to espouse his interests, while she is, in reality, serving his rival. For such scenes as these Homer is sometimes condemned, and sometimes pardoned; and, if Homer has committed an error in this, Sophocles is not free from it. The notion the ancients entertained of favourable and unfavourable Divinities was the cause that they readily admitted this poetical action of their Gods ; and upon this supposition, their age may be absolved or condemned, if you will, with more justice than their poets, who in their writings always conformed to the reigning taste. As we advance farther in this work, we shall be convinced, that the fable of the ancients was very different from their religion, and often allegorical.

Minerva calls Ajax a second time, and reproaches him for his want of attention to the voice of his patroness. Ajax comes out of his tent, and promises Minerva a trophy of the spoils, which he thinks he has carried off from his enemies. This scene is conducted with great art : for Ulysses, without being seen, hears from the mouth of his enemy himself all that it concerns him to know. Here is all the beauty of allegory complete for those that love it. For by Minerva* reason only is meant ; and as this reason, upon which mankind value themselves so much, as to consult no other but her, leads some to their proposed end, and deceives others ; so Minerva makes use of Ulysses to the prejudice of Ajax. I know that allegory must not be made the only key to antiquity ; and that Tasso, and other poets, who have followed it down to the last age, have run head-long into a labyrinth of allegories, where they have some-

* Here the allegory has certainly a place. I must intreat the reader not to judge rashly. In the sequel of this work, he will see when and how far allegory ought to be admitted in fables ; and in judging of points,

which I would only state, he will find reason to condemn both these extremes, which Plutarch mentions in his treatise of reading the poets.

times lost themselves : but when allegory comes naturally into fable, of which it is, after all, the original, since the heathens made Divinities of all visible objects, it is natural likewise to feel it, and to enter into those images which the poet attempts to lay before us, without endeavouring to find any mystery in the rest, where the allegory appears less evidently.

The Goddess, by her artful questions, draws Ajax into a confession of all his designs against the Greeks, and of the ill-will he bears to Ulysses in particular : for he boasts of having slain the principal chiefs of the army, especially the Atridæ ; but, as for the king of Ithaca, he keeps him, he says, "in close confinement, that he may languish under tedious torments, and at length expire. Minerva pretends to solicit in favour of Ulysses ; but Ajax, altho' ready to obey every other command of the Goddess, yet cannot consent to pardon Ulysses, and retires again into his tent to continue his vengeance.

" Well, Ulysses, says Minerva, thou seest the great power of
" the Gods. Was there in the whole army a wiser man, or a
" greater hero than this prince ?" She insinuates, that it was
herself who had deprived him of his reason, that she might
preserve Ulysses from death. " Ah, answers the king of Itha-
" ca, I do him justice ; and although he is my enemy, I pity
his misfortune. The sight of him creates a tender sympathy
" in my mind, and I am conscious of my own weakness. Alas !
" what are we wretched mortals, but shades and phantoms !" " Learn then, resumes Minerva, to venerate the Gods, and not to
" derive insolence from the advantages thou dost possess over others.
" The short space of one day is sufficient to raise or to depress a
" mortal. Humility is pleasing to the Gods, but pride and in-
" lence offend them." These few words inculcate the moral
which Sophocles has a view to in this tragedy. Ajax was haughty,
ambitious, and untractable ; and these vices plunged him into an
abyss of miseries. Here the Chorus, who have not yet appeared,
enter. It is natural for the subjects of Ajax, upon the report that
was spread concerning him throughout the army, to come and en-
quire into the condition of their sovereign, and of these Sophocles
has judiciously composed the Chorus. They immediately declare
the occasion of their coming thither, their fears for Ajax, and
their hatred of Ulysses, who affects to confirm in whispers the sus-
picions conceived against Ajax. This scene is an eulogium of the

soldiers upon their general. It is full of grand sentences, the following passage is just and beautiful.

“ Those malignant censures to which the great are exposed
“ find a ready admission into all minds; yet the poor have always
“ need of princes: but such is the ingratitude of men, that they
“ hate those from whom they have received obligations. In your
“ absence, they will mangle your reputation, and should you ap-
“ pear, a single glance will freeze them with terror.”

They ask one another what can be the cause of the rage of Ajax? They conclude, that the Gods have struck him with madness; this was the popular opinion, of which we have already seen some examples in regard to Phedra, for they ascribed all accidents to superior causes. “ At length, say they, we must give credit to the
“ vile reports of Ulysses; these are the consequences of his malice:
“ shew yourself Ajax, why are you concealed within your tent?
“ Why do you give your enemies an occasion of triumph over you?”

A C T II.

Tecmessa the captive, and the wife of Ajax, comes out of the tent upon these cries of the Salaminians. She appears in great affliction, and tells them, in very pathetic terms, the cause of her sorrow. Ajax, far from his country and relations, is fallen into a strange disease. The Salaminians press her to tell them what had passed during the preceding night. “ Alas, says she, how can I relate
“ these horrors! you may with your own eyes see the bloody ef-
“ fects of his delirium.” She afterwards gives a short and lively description of her husband’s frantick rage; so that the soldiers, terrified at this recital, think themselves lost. Will the Atridae and the army, convinced that Ajax had an intention to destroy them, spare his miserable troops destitute of a leader? they deliberate whether they should not endeavour to preserve themselves by instant flight. Tecmessa retains them. “ Ajax, says she, has recovered his senses;
“ but (adds she fighing) his disorder is but the more violent. While
“ his frenzy continued, the wretched condition I saw him in gave
“ me unutterable pangs; but this silent anguish, this melancholy
“ gloom, this keen sense of shame, throws me into despair: then he
“ was ignorant of his misfortune, now he is but too sensible of it.” After these few words, the soldiers prevail upon her to continue her recital.

This.

This continuation is so noble, so full of nature and passion, that I could not think myself dispensed with, from giving it entire. Tecmessa goes on in this manner: "Hear then our distresses and "lamentations, since you will feel their effects. When night had "spread her sable veil over the earth, Ajax armed himself with "his sword, and prepared to issue out of his tent. I endeavoured "to retain him. What would you do, my lord? Why thus incessantly and without orders, do you charge yourself with the care of watching over the army? Have you received any secret orders? Has the trumpet sounded? Remember, I beseech you, "that the whole army is buried in sleep. He made me his usual answer, * Silence is the portion and the ornament of women. I forbore to importune him, and he left me. I knew not what passed during his absence; but at his return, I saw him driving before him, a great number of sheep and dogs. He exercised his rage upon these despicable animals; he cut the throats of some, he stabbed others, and on several, he inflicted the punishment of slaves †. Again he went out of his tent, and stopping with some invisible Demon, still foaming with rage against the Atridæ, and the king of Ithaca, he boasted with scorn, that he had at length taken vengeance for the injuries he had received. Once more he entered his tent, still frantick; and it was not till a long time after, that he awakened as from a dream. His reason returning, he beheld his tent filled with blood and mangled carcases: then he struck his head; he cried aloud; he threw himself prostrate among the mangled carcases, he tore his hair, and lay for some moments, like one stupid with grief. At length recovering, he stormed, he raved, he questioned me concerning what had passed; and, with horrid imprecations, commanded me to give him a faithful account of all that had happened to him. I obeyed him but too well, for immediately he broke into lamentations, such as I had never heard proceed from his mouth. Formerly he used to say, that only weak minds had recourse to tears and complaints; his grief was always calm and silent, he kept it close, shut up in his own heart; and, like a bull expect-

* A German, who went to visit Madame Dacier, as an extraordinary person, intreated her, as was customary with strangers, to give him a sentence and her name; accordingly she wrote this sentence from Sopho-

cles, in his pocket-book, γῆραις κόσμοις ἡ σιγὴ φένται. Silence is the portion and the ornament of women.

† The lash.

" ing the stroke of death, he stifled even his groans : but now this
 " hero, overwhelmed with misery, languishes without food ; he
 " lies extended on the ground, among the animals whom he has
 " sacrificed to his rage, and seems to meditate something fatal.
 " This is what his cries and his complaints presage. Alas my
 " friends ! I came out only to implore your assistance ; enter his
 " tent, endeavour to recall him to reason ; the unhappy are sen-
 " sible to the soft soothings of friendship."

Here Tecmessa concludes, and immediately they hear the cries of Ajax. " Ah miserable wretch that I am, exclaims Tecmessa, " he calls for thee my son, my Eurisaces !" This sentiment is very natural : the tenderness of the mother is alarmed ; she dreads, lest the fury of the frantic father should fall upon her son. Ajax cries, " It " is Teucer whom I call ; will he always make incursions upon " his enemy, till his brother is destroyed ? " Tecmessa opens the tent. Ajax is seen within it : he knows his faithful Salaminians ; and after shewing them the marks of his frenzy, he groans at the thought of his becoming the jest of his enemies.

In all he says there appears some remains of wildness ; it is the image of a sea still ruffled, tho' the tempest is past. The Chorus endeavour to comfort him, with the usual arguments ; while the prince, always meditating upon his vengeance so cruelly disappointed, sometimes wishes to see Ulysses and the Greeks, that he might sacrifice them to his rage, and die afterwards ; and sometimes invokes the infernal deities, in the most affecting manner imaginable. It is the eloquence of despair, exclamations (even to things inanimate) sentiments dictated by nature, and varied by grief : those reflections upon one's own condition, so familiar to the ancients, and the language of terror, and compassion, which in dramatick representations, produce such great emotions. His reputation so deeply wounded is what affects Ajax most ; he compares what he is, with what he has been : the thought drives him to despair. " He is become an object of horror and contempt to the " Greeks ! what shall he do ? Shall he return to his own country ? " How will Telamon receive a son who has been shamefully de- " prived of Achilles' armour ? Shall he go singly and throw him- " self into Troy, to die by the hands of the Trojans ? This would " give the Atridae too much satisfaction." At length he resolves to wash away his disgrace in his blood, and give himself death.

Tecmessa endeavours to dissuade him from this fatal resolution, by arguments so tender and pathetick, that it is not possible to

read

read them unmoved. The poet does not give her that studied delicacy of sentiment which has since been the fashion upon the stage. Hers are the animated expressions of conjugal affection. She places before his eyes, a wife and son, whom his death will reduce to slavery, and expose to the most barbarous insults, and a father and mother in extreme old age, whose only consolation it is, to pray to the Gods, and to hope for the happy return of Ajax. Again she resumes the point which most concerns her. "Alas, "a Phrygian by birth, once the slave of Ajax, and now thy wife, "to thee I have devoted all my tenderness; thou art the only good "that I have left. Thou deprivedst me of all; by thee my family "was ruined, my mother murdered; the destinies had cut my fa- "ther's thread before, both parents are in the tomb. Should I "lose thee, who will be to me instead of my country, and all thou "hast bereft me of? I have no resource but thee; live then for "me at least." &c.

Ajax desires to see his son. The child is brought to him, he embraces him. This scene is extremely moving; we fancy we see Hector giving Astyanax his last embrace. "Approach, says Ajax, "to the slave who has him in her arms; come near. This infant "will not be terrified at the sight of blood and slaughter, if he in- "herits his father's courage; at least he should be accustomed to "imitate him. Oh mayst thou be happier than thy father, and in "all things resemble him but in his fortune!" Virgil copies So-
phocles in the speech he makes Æneas address to Ascanius his son. Virg. Eneid. B. 17. v. 435;

"Disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque labore,
"Fortunam ex aliis."

Ajax continues. "Thou hast at least the advantage of not feeling "thy misfortunes, O happy age! when we are insensible of grief. "This is indeed to live, but soon shall this envied state be past. "When thou hast attained to riper years, then it is thy part to "shew our enemies from what a father thou didst receive thy "birth." Ajax turns to the Salaminians, and recommends his son to them. He forbids them to give his armour as a prize, for the contending armies of Greece, in the same manner as the armour of Achilles was. "Thou, my dear Euryaces, says he, "shalt inherit this formidable buckler whose name thou bearest. "Let the rest of my arms be placed in my tomb; do thou, Tecmes- "fa, carry back this child: Let not the softness and pity natural to "your sex, betray you to clamorous expressions of sorrow, in a "camp. Retire immediately with the child." He feels himself softened here, and therefore endeavours to recall his fortitude, and

pro-

pronounces these last words with a degree of fierceness, which gives room to fear the speedy execution of his fatal designs. "Ah" cries Tecmessa, what wounds dost thou give my heart! I conjure thee, in the name of this infant, thy only son, and by the Gods, "do not destroy thyself." "Art thou ignorant, answers the inexorable Ajax, that I no longer owe any thing to the Gods?" An answer which plainly shews, that he has already taken his resolution.

While he terrifies Tecmessa, by his fatal obstinacy, the Chorus lament his misfortune, and complain of the injustice of the Atridae; but Ajax, who begins to be apprehensive that his Salaminians will oppose the design he has formed to kill himself, feigns to be moved with the tears of his wife, and to have altered his resolution. He tells his soldiers, that he will go and bathe himself in a fountain, by way of lustration, to expiate the slaughter of the night; and that he will afterwards bury in the earth, the unfortunate sword, the sad inheritance he had received from Hector, and now become hateful to him, since it had been the instrument of his wild rage. He declares that he will make satisfaction to the Atridae for what he had done, in order to recover their good opinion; and on this occasion, he repeats that celebrated sentence of Bias, which Cicero has expressed his disapprobation of; namely, That we ought to live with our enemies, as if they were one day to be our friends; and with our friends, as if they were to become our enemies. The Chorus, deceived by this seeming change of mind, close the act with songs of joy, till Ajax returns.

A C T III.

An attendant enters, and gives notice of the arrival of Teucer, the brother of Ajax; who, as it has been hinted, in the course of the tragedy, had been long expected. He declares, that this prince was very near being murdered by the Grecian soldiers; but that the tumult had been quelled by their commanders. This man desires to see Ajax. The Chorus tell him that he is absent. "Alas, cries the messenger, I am afraid that I am come too late." For Teucer had left strict orders with his brothers attendants, not to suffer him to stir out of his tent till his return. The Salaminians in vain attempt to remove the apprehensions of this messenger. He acquaints them with the occasion of his uneasiness: It was a prediction of Calchas. Ajax had not much devotion to the Gods, and this was the first cause of his misfortunes. When Telamon his

his father exhorted him to fight valiantly under the auspices of the Gods, he answered him, that a victory obtained by the assistance of a deity was the victory of a coward; and one day addressing himself to Minerva, he said, “ Goddess give thy aid to other Greeks; they have need of it: as for me, I do not fear my enemies.” This was the origin of Minerva’s displeasure against him; and it was upon this occasion, that Calchas had pointed out to Teucer the day in which the Goddesses had resolved to execute her vengeance upon Ajax. “ Let him not go out that day,” said Calchas, and he is safe.” Teucer’s messenger adds, “ If the prediction of Calchas be true, Ajax, since he is gone out, will perish.”

Tecmessa is called. This shocking news throws her back into that anxiety and grief, from which she had so lately, and with such difficulty been relieved. She instantly dispatches some of the Salaminians in search of Ajax, and others to bring Teucer. She is now but too well convinced, that her husband’s design was to deceive her, and free himself from her complaints. She runs herself to seek him, uncertain what path she shall take; and thus the stage remains free for Ajax, who enters on the other side. This is a master stroke of Sophocles, to dismiss the Chorus with propriety; and indeed this passage is greatly praised by the Abbé d’ Aubignac.*

A C T IV.

The return of Ajax is an excellent scene. All that a calm and deliberate despair suggests most horrible is there painted; and in the most striking colours. “ The instrument of my death is prepared,” says Ajax, as he enters. In effect he has fixed the pommel of his sword in the earth, that he may throw himself upon its point. He continues; “ What then remains for me to do, but to invoke the Gods?” He begins with Jupiter, and implores of this God, that it may be Teucer who finds him bathed in his blood, that he may preserve his body from the cruel vengeance of the Greeks, who will give it to be devoured by vultures: a thing very important for the defence of the last act, which we shall shew.

He afterwards begs of Mercury, to procure him a death speedy, and resembling a soft slumber. He next addresses his prayers to the Furies, and implores them to revenge his death upon the Atridae. “ Oh powerful Goddesses, let them suffer the severest effects of

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* Pratique du Théâtre.

" your rage; and as they will see me dead, by my own hands, may
 " they expire by the hands of those who are dearest to them.
 " * Go, ye, Eumenides, fly, strike, spare none of the hated Greeks,
 " may the whole army perish! And thou, oh Sun, when from thy
 " chariot thou beholdest my native country, stop thy steeds a
 " moment, and to my aged father, to my unhappy mother, declare
 " the fate of Ajax! Alas, when they shall hear I am no more,
 " how will the whole city resound with their lamentable cries!
 " But it is not now a time to talk of tears and sorrows; my busi-
 " ness is to die. Oh death, deign to behold me with a favourable
 " eye! soon shall we dwell together in the mansions of the infer-
 " nal deities! Oh day, oh Sun, I shall never behold you more! Oh
 " Salamine, oh thou palace of my ancestors, adieu! adieu, my long-
 " loved friends! Ye rivers, ye meads and fountains, who saw my
 " birth, receive the last farewell of Ajax! for the Shades I reserve
 " the rest." Here he kills himself, and probably in a corner of
 the stage. The moderns use less ceremony when they shew a
 hero putting an end to his life. This is done cavalierly enough.
 Racine and the ancients reviewed it more clearly, because nature
 requires it.

A fine situation is not to be sought for at the expence of nature and propriety. Part of the Chorus return still seeking Ajax; the rest enter on the other side, having been equally unsuccessful. Tecmessa comes in afterwards, and she, as being more interested and penetrating, discovers the body of Ajax, and acquaints the Chorus with it. All this is full of tenderness and passion; for Tecmessa enumerates all the misfortunes she had but too well foreseen. Teucer, whom they had sought for in vain, arrives in the midst of this confusion and distress; he knows not yet the fatal accident that has happened. The Chorus acquaint him with it, without any disguise. What a stroke was this for a brother and a friend! He desires to see the body of Ajax, which Tecmessa had covered with her robe, and tenderly laments over it. " Oh shock-
 " ing fight! Oh unfortunate voyage! He had hastened to prevent
 " this cruel misfortune, and fate did not permit him to arrive in
 " time. How shall he dare to behold again his wretched parents,

* The imprecations of the dying were considered and dreaded as so many oracles. Those of Ajax were partly accomplished. Agamemnon was murdered by his wife, the fleet was dispersed in a storm, and very few of the Greeks returned to their own country.

" after being unable to preserve their son ? What reports will not be raised to his disadvantage ? That delay which was his misfortune will be imputed to him as a crime. What resource shall he find among the Trojans, his enemies ? could it have been imagined that Hector, tho' dead, should be the murderer of Ajax ? Oh how wretched has been the destiny of these two heroes ! Their mutual presents have been fatal to them both. Hector, bound with the belt which he received from Ajax, was dragged along the earth by furious coursers ; Ajax perished by the sword that Hector gave him. Oh without doubt, Hell and the Furies formed these cruel gifts." He concludes the speech with this sentence : " Certainly, says he, all this cannot be the effect of chance ; it is the work of the Gods, who permitted these things to happen : such is my opinion ; let others judge as they please." This tacking of sentences to the finest passages was the genius of the Greeks ; but in our age it would not please.

Ajax being dead, it should seem that the tragedy is concluded ; yet it is not, nor ought to be so, if we reflect on the notions the ancients had of sepulchral rites. With them, death was not the last of miseries ; to be deprived of burial, was an infamy far more terrible than death itself. This circumstance is the foundation of the remaining scenes : according to our taste, it is a defect ; and yet in this, Sophocles has made the chief force of his tragedy consist.

Menelaus, upon the report of Ajax's death, comes on the part of the Grecian princes, to forbid Teucer to bury him. This cruel prohibition raises a contest between vengeance on one side, and tenderness on the other : Menelaus and Teucer support their different opinions with such strong reasons, that the contested burial becomes an affair of state. This sort of policy appears strange to us ; and here is the immense chaos, the invincible obstacle, which hinders us from entering into the manners of the ancients, in order to judge properly of their dramatic works. Menelaus coloured over the hatred which the Greeks bore to Ajax with the pretence of political interest, and private vengeance with the punishment due to a crime against the state. " Ajax, says, he, dead as he is, ought to suffer the punishment due to his designed crime ; although a Goddefis prevented the execution of it, what would become of a kingdom or an army, if guilt like his was passed over with impunity ? what would be the consequence if each individual was allowed to follow the guidance of his own passions ?

Teucer, enraged at the imperious manner assumed by Menelaus, asks him, upon what he founded that authority he affected on this occasion. "Was not Ajax, says he, a king, as well as yourself? " did he follow your colours as a subject?" The dispute grows warmer; and at length Menelaus retires, that he may execute by force those commands which Teucer had refused to obey.

Mean time, Teucer places the son of Ajax at the feet of his dead father, with some locks of hair cut off, to be spread upon his tomb. Tecmessa assists at this funeral ceremony; and this spectacle so singular to us, must needs be very affecting to the Greeks: for Teucer, being obliged to go in search of a proper place to bury Ajax in, leaves him as a precious trust to an infant, and an afflicted wife, in order to excite the compassion of those who might be commissioned by the Greeks, to take away the body. "Whoever dares to attempt it (says he as he is going) may he perish! may he and his whole posterity have the same fate with this hair, "which I now cut off!" It is either his or the child's; a Pagan rite which we have observed upon before. The Chorus as usual express their grief for the death of Ajax, and begin the mourning, or funeral ceremony.

A C T V.

Teucer returns, and is immediately followed by Agamemnon; and here a new quarrel arises upon the body of Ajax. It must be confessed, that the Greek heroes treat each other very rudely: but such were the manners of a nation, in other respects so polite; for in this the Romans have copied the Greeks, as is plain by the abuse with which Cicero loads Verres and Pison. In Sophocles, however, these railings are not quite so harsh and brutal as in Cicero and Homer; but, to own the truth, the two warriors are indecent enough to reproach each other with the stain in their birth: and however eloquent these reproaches may be, I believe there is no French reasoning that can make them be swallowed.

It is therefore sufficient to warn the reader candidly of these indecorums, without giving him the trouble to read them here. The Chorus endeavour in vain to pacify these princes; but Ulysses enters very seasonably, to prevent the consequence of so dangerous a quarrel.

He represents to Agamemnon, that his hatred has lasted long enough; and that it is unworthy of a hero to persecute his enemy after his death. "As for me, adds Ulysses, I hated him as long

" as I could do so without a crime. Ajax was my enemy, but still he was no less a hero; and my admiration of his valour was greater than my resentment of that enmity he bore me." This is the thought which Racine has so happily borrowed, and put into the mouth of Pyrrhus, on the subject of Hector's son.

*" Mon courroux aux vaincus ne fut que trop sévère,
" Mais que ma cruauté survive à ma colère, &c."*

The sentiment is equally noble in Sophocles and Racine; but we have the expression of one, and it is impossible to render that of the other. Now all, or almost all, depends upon the expression; and here we can only present the critical reader with some faint sketches, from which he must form his judgment of the rest.

This generosity in Ulysses, whom Ajax had most offended, softens Agamemnon; and consoles Teucer so much the more, as the king of Ithaca nobly offers to assist him in performing the funeral rites. However Teucer does not accept this offer, but contents himself with the assistance of the Salaminians; he gives them his orders, and the piece concludes with the action.

But if we are surprised to see almost two acts taken up with a dispute on occasion of a sepulchre, we shall be more astonished to find a whole tragedy on the same subject: in which, however, the tender passions are excited in the highest degree. It is the tragedy of Antigone; and this ingenious piece requires either the same precautions, or the same indulgence with the foregoing.

The tragedies of Electra, and Oedipus king of Thebes, are in the first part of this work.

A N T I G O N E.

A

T R A G E D Y O F S O P H O C L E S.

ANTIGONE is a subject so nearly connected with the Thebaid, that one is unintelligible without the other: Eteocles and Polynices, the sons of Oedipus, had agreed to share the scepter of Thebes between them, and each to reign a year alternately. Eteocles the first possessor, having tasted the sweets of dominion, found himself not disposed to observe the treaty. He maintained himself upon the throne; and Polynices to recover his right entered Thebes at the head of an army of Argives: after a long and obstinate battle, the two brothers agreed to decide their pretensions in a single fight, in which both fell. Creon, their uncle, assumed the crown; but the first essay he made of the supreme power, was to publish a decree, forbidding any person to bury Polynices, who he declared worthy of this infamous punishment, for having made war upon his native country. Whoever should dare to give him the rites of sepulchre, was to be interred alive.

Antigone, the sister of Polynice, thought it her duty on this occasion, to listen rather to the dictates of her tenderness than her fears; she disobeyed the law, and was the victim of it. On this last circumstance Sophocles finds his tragedy. We shall see some passages of it in Rotrou's Antigone, which is partly a translation of the Greek one. The persons are, Antigone and his sister Ismene: The Chorus composed of ancient Thebans: Creon, king of Thebes: Tirefias, a prophet: one of the guards: Eurydice the wife of Creon: Hemon his son: An officer: A slave. The scene is in the vestibule of the palace; and the time when the action begins is turned the close of the night. These two circumstances are exactly marked in the first scene, as was the constant practice of Sophocles.

A C T I.

Sophocles, to explain the subject, naturally introduces Antigone leading her sister Ismene to the vestibule of the palace, to communicate a secret, only proper for a sister's ear. This is a stroke of art, which shews how deeply the poet had studied dramatick probability. Antigone begins thus: "My dear Ismene, is the wretched family of Oedipus destined to suffer any miseries
of

" which Jupiter has not already inflicted upon it? Ah no, guilt, " ignominy, and despair, have concurred to form our common " woes! do you know what a barbarous edict is designed to be " published by the new king? Our brothers, replies Ismene, are " slain by each other's hands, the forces of the Argives are wholly " defeated: this is all I know. Well, resumes Antigone, I know " more; and it is to impart this secret to you, that I have brought " you out of the palace."

She tells her sister, that Creon has given orders for solemnizing the funeral of Eteocles, but has forbid the Thebans, on pain of death, to bury the body of Polynices; that he will soon appear, and publish this inhuman decree himself; and that she perceives but too well the black designs he has formed against them: for she adds, those words which I shall take from Rotrou, asking some indulgence for the antiquated style of the master of Corneille.

" L' Ordonnance avec soi porte sa fin expresse.

" C'est à nous qu'elle parle, à nous qu'elle s'adresse, &c."

*Antigone de
Rotrou. Act
3d, Sc. 9th.*

Here is at least the sense, and the turn of Sophocles. The reader perhaps will not be displeased, to see part of the scene, which is almost literally translated from the Greek.

ISMENE. " Dieux, que proposez-vous ? & que pouvons-nous faire
" Qui ne soit inutile au repos de mon frère ?

ANTIG. " Acquittons-nous au moins selon notre pouvoir.

ISMEN. " Mais, ma sœur, l'impuissance excuse le devoir.

ANTIG. " Quoi, vous vous défendez d'un si pieux ouvrage!

ISMEN. " L'espérance me manque, & non pas le courage."

Rotrou pushes this thought too far, and makes it sink at last to a jingle of words: We will now return to Sophocles.

ANTIG. But Polynices is our brother.

ISMEN. Creon is our king, and will be obeyed.

ANTIG. Ah, can he force me to neglect the remains of a brother?

ISMEN. Alas, Antigone, Oedipus our wretched father, after having deprived himself of sight, ended his days in grief and ignominy! His mother, his wife, two names of misery, died by her own hand; our brothers perished in one day by each other's sword. We who are the miserable remains of this unhappy race, must expect to suffer a more cruel fate, if we offend our tyrant.

" Nous ne pouvons rien.

" Un peu d'abaissement aujourd'hui nous fied bien. &c.

Ibid.

ANTIG.

ANTIG. Away, I will solicit thee no longer, thy coward fear would render thy assistance useless to me; enjoy thy prudence, temporise, and be safe: Polynices shall receive the last offices from me alone; and if I die for this act, my death will be glorious; I shall be the victim of my piety, and share his tomb. Go, dishonour the Gods, dishonour the dead, since that is thy choice. Secure of being ever with them, it is they, and not tyrants, whom I seek to please.

ISMEN. "Ah, que vous me causez une frayeur extrême!"

Ibid.

ANTIG. "Ne m'épouvez pas, & tremblez sur vous-même, &c.

Although these verses are a little antiquated, yet the turn of them is natural, and well expresses that of the Greek poet; whose thoughts, however, if they had been more faithfully rendered, would possibly have pleased more. This scene is of the same kind with that between Electra and Crysóthemis *: there is the same contrast of character between those two princesses as between Antigone and Ismene.

The Chorus, composed of the old men of Thebes, who are assembled by Creon's command, blesß, as they enter, the happy day in which Thebes is saved from the triumph of the Argives. He who speaks for the rest, recounts the fatal events of which he had been a witness; and celebrates the victory of the Thebans. A Latin translator has made of this hymn, sung by the Chorus, a very beautiful ode; in which, the comparison of Thebes with a dragon, and that of the enemies army with an eagle, are finely expressed; as likewise the visible protection which Jupiter gave the Thebans: the murder of the two brothers, and the complete victory gained over the Argives. This ode concludes with a line, which also marks the time of the night. "Let us go and fill the temples with "our nocturnal songs." There Creon arrives, who had given orders for the old Thebans to assemble.

Creon makes a speech to them, in which, after praising their fidelity to their kings, and repeating a sentence, since quoted by Demosthenes, namely, *that a king is never well known till he reigns*, he displays prodigious zeal for Thebes; and, as the first proof of it, publishes his decree, forbidding any of his subjects to bury Polynices, whom he considers as the enemy of his country; but for Eteocles, who had valiantly defended the state, he ordains extraordinary funeral honours. Thus he makes the punishment equal to the ho-

* Electra of Sophocles, Vol. 1. Act III. p. 474.

nour, and maintains, that the one ought to be as shameful as the other glorious.

The old men, without reflecting on Creon's political designs in this decree, and the consequences of them, blindly submit to the will of their sovereign: Sophocles has introduced this mean submission expressly, to make the Athenians sensible of their happy freedom. This law thus published, and meeting with no contradiction, passes for a law of the whole state. Yet Creon, tho' the Chorus take upon them to answer for the obedience of the rest of the Thebans, suffers it to be perceived, that he is apprehensive he shall find some of them disobedient. Rotrou has imitated this scene also, and has even improved upon Sophocles; for he supposes that the affair was brought under deliberation, introduces two courtiers, one of whom subscribes to the law, and justifies it, and the other ventures to condemn it in these terms:

*“ C'est trop, Cléodamas, exagérer son crime,
“ Que sa prétention fût juste ou légitime, &c.”*

Rotrou Anti-
gone Act 4th,
Sc. 1st.

This passage, which was formerly shining, and is now old fashioned, by the wanton change of the modes of expression, shews us at least, the taste and manner of thinking of a poet, whose works are no longer read. But we will now return to Sophocles.

One of the guards enters in great terror, and produces a suspension, which proves how much Creon is already feared in Thebes, and what exact obedience was paid there to the commands of the sovereign. His recital is full of simplicity. He trembles, he says, to utter what he knows; and that in his way hither, he often said to himself: “Where art thou going, unhappy man? Thou art hastening to certain death: but if thou shouldest stay, thou wilt offend Creon, and be more miserable still.” These were melancholly reflections, adds he, and short as the journey was, made it seem tedious. The delicate simplicity of these passages, was not by the Greeks judged unworthy the dignity of tragedy. And why indeed should it? Because Terence was the first who introduced it in his comedies, and Seneca had not taste enough to give it a place in tragedy.

The soldiers being puffed to explain himself, and reassured by the king, who promises to dismiss him in safety, at length declares, that some person had already begun to give funeral honours to the body of Polynices; that is, that a black cloak was spread over him, and the libations of the dead poured upon the corps. He protests, that none of the guards knew when this was done, or had any

any means of discovering the author. So that at first they supposed it to be a prodigy; but that at last, they suspected each other; and, in the heat of their mutual accusations, they came almost to blows. He adds, that they were all ready to prove their innocence, by walking through the midst of flames. These are the poet's words; and that, at length one of them had determined, by his authority, to decide by lot, who should carry this news to the king.

The Chorus add, that they are induced to believe this was the work of the Gods; but Creon reproves them severely for this thought. "How is it probable that the Gods would themselves honour with a tomb, the traitor who had so lately with flaming torches surrounded their temples and violated their laws?" He therefore attributes this attempt to some factious persons, who had with bribes purchased ministers of their rebellious pity, to infringe the law. He suspects the guards, and threatens to put them all to death, if they do not find out the criminal. The soldier withdraws, happy in getting off so easily, and fwears he will return no more.

The intervening Chorus gives a moral lecture upon the wonderful dexterity of man, who turns to good or evil that inventive genius which the Gods bestow; but who knows no art by which he can escape death. This morality relates to the pretended criminal, who has had the address to pay the last duties to Polynices, notwithstanding the vigilance of the guards, yet is without the means of avoiding the punishment which attends him. In effect, the Chorus see Antigone that moment brought in, who had been discovered near the corps.

A C T II.

The same soldier who had appeared in the first act, returns, notwithstanding his oath to the contrary; of which he thinks himself disengaged by the publick faith; and brings Antigone to answer to the king for what she had done. The princess, fearless of the tyrant's power, acknowledges all that the soldier had accused her of, who found her burying Polynices; and even boasts of the deed. Rotrou has rendered the thought of Sophocles very justly in two lines.

CREON. " Vous faisiez donc vertu de transgesser mes loix.
ANTIG. "Oui, pour servir les Dieux qui sont plus que les rois."

It

" It was neither Jupiter, says she, nor Justice, which dictated " your decree ; nor was it ever my opinion that any human law could " dispense with our obedience to divine laws : laws which, tho' not " written, are immutable ; and whose origin is so ancient, that it " cannot be known." The rest of her speech upon fraternal piety and contempt of death, has equal force and energy. It is surprising that the Chorus, whose office it is, as Horace says, to support and defend virtue, dare not approve of this fortitude in Antigone : doubtless for fear of offending Creon. This prince, enflamed with rage, vows to put her to death, and her sister likewise, whom he suspects of being an accomplice in her crime. But he is particularly offended with Antigone, who, with a noble pride, defies his tyranny. Creon tells her, that she is the only person to whom the action she has committed appears just and honourable. The princess, pointing to the Chorus, replies, that it is fear alone which chains their tongues, and obliges them to conceal their real sentiments.

The afflicted Ismene comes to share her sister's danger. Creon haughtily asks her, if she owns herself equally guilty with Antigone? Yes, answers Ismene, I declare myself her accomplice ; " the deed is too glorious to be denied." This scene is a beautiful contest of generosity. Ismene, no longer influenced by her former terrors, feigns herself guilty, that she may suffer death with her sister. Antigone will not yield her the glory of the crime and the punishment. " You did not even approve of my design, says she to " her : Ah ! replies the other, I am not ashamed of thy misfortunes, " and I would associate myself in thy dangers."

ANTIG. The Gods know which of us is guilty : I will never acknowledge for friends those who love me in professions only.

ISMEN. Do not, my sister, offer me so cruel an indignity, as to hinder me from dying with thee. Suffer me at least, to appease, by the sacrifice of my life, the neglected manes of a brother.

ANTIG. No, leave me the crime, and the punishment.

ISMEN. Alas ! what will become of me if I lose thee ?

ANTIG. Ask Creon that question, since thou hast been mean enough to acknowledge him for thy master.

ISMEN. Oh, my Antigone, this is too unkind !

ANTIG. I pity thee, Ismene ; but thou hast, by thy abject fears, merited this punishment.

ISMEN. Alas! what can I do more than beg to die with thee?

ANTIG. Live. I do not envy thee that happiness.

ISMEN. Wretch, that I am, shall I live, and see thee perish!

ANTIG. Life was thy choice, and death is mine.

ISMEN. Ah, I foretold what would be the consequence of thy pious cares!

ANTIG. Thy prudence will be acceptable in a court like this: my fortitude seeks for applauses in the shades.

ISMEN. The crime was common to us both.

ANTIG. No, Ismene, live. As for me, I have long since devoted my life to the glory of honouring those I loved.

This mutual generosity becomes haughtiness in Antigone, in Ismene it is compassion; it is tenderness for a sister, whom she cannot resolve to abandon in her distress. "What! says she to the "tyrant; wilt thou murder the destined wife of thy son?" For Hemon was in love with Antigone; but Creon sacrifices this tender interest to his policy and his rage. Antigone regrets nothing but her lover: a sigh escapes her for him; or rather, she pities him for his misfortune, in having a father so inhuman. The tyrant incensed to the last degree, appears determined to put Antigone to death; and orders the two sisters to be separated. Rhotomus has given us the same friendly contest between the princesses. He has also introduced another between Antigone and the wife of Polynices: for he supposes this prince to have brought his wife with him to Thebes, in hopes of establishing himself upon the throne.

From all this, the old men draw a general moral, upon the miseries inseparable from the condition of mortals; and particularly, upon the afflictions with which the throne of Oedipus was overwhelmed. There is among others, a beautiful strophe upon the supreme power of Jupiter; which not even eternity can stop: and upon his wisdom, which extends to the future as well as to the past. In another, we have the application of a saying of one of the sages; namely, that to those whom fate pushes on to their ruin, evil has the appearance of good. The Chorus here have a view to the pretended crime of Antigone.

A C T III.

Hemon, having heard the melancholy news concerning Antigone, comes full of grief to solicit the king his father in her behalf. He speaks to him at first with all the respect and moderation of a

son, and even seems to neglect the interests of the lover; for he protests, that he is ready to submit his inclinations to those of his father, if he judges them wrong-placed; and that however ardent his passion may be, he will sacrifice it to his will. Here Creon stops him, by replying, that he cannot do better than to make such a sacrifice: and to enforce the necessity of following this harsh maxim, he exaggerates Antigone's crime, as an instance of disobedience, pernicious to the state: and shews the necessity a king is under, to give examples of severity; which may contain the people in their duty.

But in all these seeming fine maxims, it is apparent that the man speaks more than the king. He cannot pardon the affront of having been braved by a young princess. The scene of Diego and Rodrigue in the Cid, has a great similarity with this. Diego says like Creon.

“ Nous n'avons qu'un honneur: il est tant de maîtresses, &c.”

Rofrou concludes this discourse of Creon with a sentence which he did not find in Sophocles, but which follows naturally from it.

“ Sur les desseins des Rois, comme sur ceux des dieux,

“ De fidèles sujets doivent fermer les yeux,

“ Et soumettant leur sens au pouvoir des couronnes,

“ Quelles que soient les loix, croire qu'elles sont bonnes.”

The Chorus approve of what Creon says. This is a piece of flattery. They also commend, tho' timidly, the answer made by Hemon, of which this is the substance:

“ Prudence, oh father, is a gift of the Gods! and the greatest
 “ they have bestowed upon mortals. It does not become me to
 “ contradict the decisions of a father; and there are courtiers
 “ enough in thy presence to applaud them. But it is thy sons
 “ duty to declare to thee the real sentiments of the people. They
 “ disguise them through respect; and flattery is the only language
 “ they dare speak in thy court. Yet I have heard their secret
 “ murmurs: all Thebes lament Antigone, as worthy of a fate far
 “ different from that she is doomed to suffer. How! say the The-
 “ bans, does not a princess whose piety has led her to expose her-
 “ self to death, to procure a brother the last good that mortals can
 “ expect, does not she deserve a crown rather than death? Oh
 “ my father! nothing is dearer to me than thy preservation and
 “ the welfare of the state. Does not a son enjoy the glory of his
 “ father? feels not the father a tender satisfaction in the glory of

" his son? Suffer me to conjure thee by this mutual affection, not " to be determined by that too common prejudice, that a king is " always in the right." This moral is carried very far, according to the manner of the Greeks. He concludes with imploring his father to suffer his heart to be moved; and to entertain more favourable sentiments towards the princess. This whole speech is nobly translated by Rotrou; of which the following lines are part.

" Jamais la vérité, cette fille timide,
" Pour entrer chez les rois ne trouve qui la guide:
" Au lieu que le mensonge a mille partisans,
" Et vous est présenté par tous vos courtisans."

Creon, enraged to see a son presumptuous enough to reprove his father and his king, treats him more like a slave than a subject and a son. The contest is revived by several verses of quick dialogue, written in a way worthy of Sophocles; and which I would give the reader in Rotrou's manner, if that was not rather a little antiquated. The moderation of the son becomes firmness; the anger of the father rises to fury. He gives orders for Antigone to be brought and put to death, before the eyes of Hemon. Hemon retires in a transport of grief, after speaking those beautiful lines which I take from the French poet, who has so closely imitated Sophocles.

" Ce ne sera jamais, au moins en ma présence,
" Que l'on accomplira cette injuste sentence;
" Faites à vos flatteurs autoriser vos loix,
" Et voyez votre fils pour la dernière fois."

Creon, that he may leave his son no opportunity of raising a sedition to rescue the princess, resolves to hasten his vengeance. He excepts Ismena from punishment, but condemns Antigone to be enclosed alive in a cave, with a morcel of bread, that the odium of her death may not fall upon Thebes. Such was the superstition of the Pagans, who found out the secret of satiating their revenge, without incurring any guilt; for to starve a person to death was judged impious; and that the shades of those condemned to this punishment, might not reproach their native earth, with having swallowed them, to be dispensed with from nourishing them, a small quantity of food was given to such as were thus buried alive. Creon closes this scene by an impious pleasantry. " An-

" ti-

"tigone, says he, will obtain of Pluto, the only duty she reverences, the privilege of not dying: or rather, she will learn, how little advantage it is to pay honours to the infernal divinities."

As a contrast to this tumult of theatrical business, the two following scenes are extremely pathetic. The old men, reflecting upon Hemon's passion for Antigone, thus exclaim upon the force of love.

"Oh Love, invincible Deity! although thou dwellest on the cheek of transient beauty; yet by thee, the fairest fortune is overthrown. Thy empire extends over earth, air, and sea: the Gods, as well as mortals, own thy power. None are exempted from thy darts; they fix thy fatal fury in the mind. By thee, even the wife and good are plunged in guilt. It is thou, oh powerful Divinity, who hast raised a new tempest in the wretched house of Oedipus!"

The Chorus cannot refuse some tears to the fate of Antigone, whose nuptial bed, say they, is a tomb.

Antigone and the Chorus make the second scene. She comes to utter her last complaint, after the manner of the ancients; and which the Latins call *novissima verba*. We have the same custom observed in the Iphigenia in Aulis.* Nothing can be more affecting than these passages in all the Greek poets; among whom, these lamentations were certainly in use:

ANTIG. Ye citizens of Thebes! behold an unhappy princess, who is entering upon that last sad journey, which all mortals must take; and who now sees the sun never to see it more. Eternal night, which will involve the whole human race, conducts me while alive, to the gloomy shores of Acheron. This is the marriage which was prepared for me. Alas, Hymen kindles not his torch for me! for me the temples have not resounded with the nuptial song!

She compares herself to Niobe, who was changed into a rock of marble. The Chorus praise her more than they console her; therefore she thus attests the people:

"Oh Thebes, oh citizens, oh ye springs of Dirce; and you, ye neighbouring forests, be witness of the barbarous law which plunges me into a prison, shall I call it? or a tomb, among the dead, or living? or rather from the society of both, unwept and unlamented by those who are dearest to me."

* Iphigenia in Aulis. Act V. in the first volume of this work.

Upon some words of the Chorus, which recall the remembrance of Oedipus, whose misfortunes fall upon her, Antigone exclaims again, "Oh cruel, what a wound have you opened, by placing again before my eyes the fate of the Labdacides! Oh ye furies, who presided at the marriage of my mother! Oh horrid marriage! to what parents do I owe my birth! to what a destiny was I reserved! Oh my unhappy brother; under what fatal auspices didst thou become a husband! It is thou, my dear Polynices, who, dead as thou art, draggest me alive into my tomb."

This is a slight sketch of Antigone's last complaints; which, it is probable, have a resemblance to those of Jephthah's daughter: * when she went up to the mountains to bewail her virginity, before she submitted to a sacrifice, either real or mysterious. We ought not therefore to tax Sophocles with an error here, as if these lamentations were inconsistent with that fortitude which makes so striking a part in Antigone's character; for a person to run to death, without shewing the least concern, is not heroism, but brutal insensibility. Indeed we often see wretches who smile at the approach of their fate: yet we ought not to suppose they have surmounted the natural horror of death; but their understanding being weak, and their hearts intoxicated with guilt, they are incapable of feeling or perceiving the value of life; in the heat of battle especially. But calmly and deliberately to expose one's self to death, and yet to be sensible of the greatness of the sacrifice; this is true heroism. The complaints which Antigone makes after this effort, are the last sighs of nature: which, far from repressing the noble sentiments, force them more strongly into notice.

Creon puts an end to this moving spectacle, by an unheard-of stroke of tyranny. He expresses his displeasure, that the princesses should so long protract her complaints; and gives orders for her being instantly led to the cave; protesting, that neither he nor the Thebans will be polluted by this new kind of death.

"Oh sepulchre, cries Antigone! Oh cavern, oh my nuptial bed! thou then wilt be my everlasting dwelling. I go to meet my loved relations in the shades. Proserpine has deprived me of them all. *+I dye the last of this unhappy race, and the most miserable.*" This is the literal sense of Sophocles, which Racine, without his perceiving it perhaps has given us in this line. So ex-

* In the book of Judges, Chap. 11. v. 34. and following.

† Racine's Phedra. Act I. Scene 3d.

tremely natural is the thought, and so much he stored his mind with the turns of Sophocles and Euripides. Antigone continues thus: "Doomed to perish in the bloom of youth, I encourage the soothing hope, that my presence will be welcome to Oedipus and Jocasta; but especially to my brother. Yes, ye dear shades, it is to these hands you owe these funeral honours which you have received: and thou, Polynices, thou knowest that my life is a sacrifice to my tenderness for thee. It is enough, I have performed my duty: my crime is my glory. This justice, the good and generous will afford me. Had I been a mother, and could not but with the sacrifice of my life have paid the last duties to a husband, I would not then have defied a public law." She means, that her tenderness for her children would have withheld her from performing the funeral honours due to a deceased husband, with the danger of her life. She gives a reason for making this difference between a husband and a brother. She might have another husband she says, but Oedipus and Jocasta being dead, she could never hope for another brother. Delicate as this sentiment is, it would have a ridiculous air in our language; and be very different from the true idea of Sophocles. For it is the poet's intention to exalt the character of Antigone, by shewing her entirely innocent, and freeing her from the suspicion of having, under the mask of piety, committed an offence against the laws. "It is for a duty so just, so pious, continues she; that Creon has condemned me to perish, abandoned by those who owe me the tribute of their tears at least. Ye Gods, which of your laws have I violated? But why do I invoke the Gods? what succour can I expect from them, since it is my piety that has drawn upon me a punishment due to the impious. Ah what do I say? If my death is decreed by heaven, I yield to it. If I have sinned, I ask pardon; and submit to my punishment; but if the law which condemns me be unjust, may the authors of it suffer all those miseries with which I am loaded now."

Creon again commands the guards to take Antigone away; and this scene turns insensibly into an interlude: for the princess, as she goes out, protests against the injustice she suffers; and reproves the old men with the indifference with which they behold a princess so inhumanly treated. The old men answer no otherwise than by quoting some examples of the like ill fortune; such as that of Danae and Orpheus, who perished miserably; although descended from an illustrious race; so inevitable are the decrees of destiny.

destiny. It is their fear of the tyrant, that makes them ascribe to destiny a death which they know to be the effect of tyranny: but the poet was willing to give a true picture of the courts of kings, to strike the Athenians with the natural reflections that they made upon their liberty.

A C T IV.

Tiresias enters, led by one of his domesticks. This scene is exactly such as the old poet I have already so often quoted, has rendered it. I shall give the beginning of it here, without being apprehensive that his natural expressions will degrade the simplicity of the Greek dialogue.

TIRES. "La lumiere d'un seul fert à deux que nous sommes:
"C'est aux hommes aussi de conduire les hommes."

CREON. "Que nous apprendrez-vous, bon vieillard, qui sans yeux
"Liezez si clairement dans les secrets des Dieux, &c."

Here Tiresias relates what has happened; namely, a bloody battle between the birds, rejected sacrifices, and other circumstances of fatal augury. From all this, he concludes, that Thebes is threatened with new misfortunes, on account of the obstinacy and cruelty of Creon towards Antigone and Polynices.

Creon, transported with rage, plainly taxes the prophet with having uttered a venal prediction. Tiresias, in revenge for this insult, pronounces this terrible oracle: "Know, says he to Creon, that before the sun has finished his course, the death of one of thy sons shall revenge Polynices and Antigone. Them thou unjustly deprivedst of sepulchral honours: her thou cruelly hast entombed alive. These are the sad effects of thy tyranny, and of an impiety hated by the Gods. Already the Furies, the revengers of violated duties, are preparing to torment thee: soon wilt thou be plunged into the same miseries. Now judge whether interest has unchained my tongue. Still more and greater sorrows do I foresee for thee: soon shall thy court resound with cries and lamentations: soon shalt thou behold those cities wherein the ashes of the dead have been violated, rise up in arms against thee. These are the inevitable darts my indignation pours upon thee. Let us go child, lead me out of this palace."

Tiresias retires: the Chorus are terrified by his threats, but Creon much more; yet he thinks it hard that he should be forced to relax his vengeance. He asks advice of the Chorus. Fear is now more

more powerful than the desire of pleasing their king. They advise him not to ballance a moment longer, but to deliver Antigone, and bury Polynices. He yields, although reluctantly : he even gives orders for that purpose, and retires, to have them obeyed.

The interlude of the Chorus consists of a hymn to Bacchus, the tutelary divinity of Thebes. They endeavour to appease his wrath, and prevail upon him to turn aside from Thebes those misfortunes predicted by Tirefias.

A C T V.

An officer of the palace begins the solution of the intrigue, by the dreadful manner in which he declares to the Chorus, that the shining fortune of Creon is eclipsed. The questions of the old men draw on an explanation : at length he tells them, that Hemon has killed himself upon the body of Antigone, who had hastened her own death. The oracle is found to be but too certain.

This is the reflexion made by the Chorus. But is not this oracle too suddenly fulfilled? Could the prophet have any merit from a prediction which was accomplished, or at least accomplishing at the very time that he pronounced it? Should not Creon have been wise enough to have foreseen this accident ? and ought he not to have placed guards upon his son, as well as upon the two princesses? However this may be, Eurydice the wife of Creon, alarmed at the confused exclamations she hears as she is coming out of the palace, to go to the temple, desires the Thebans to acquaint her with the cause.

The officer begins his recital with telling the queen that he will not flatter her misery ; and that what he has to say will overwhelm her with grief. He then relates how Creon, incited by a too late repentance, had performed the last duties to the miserable remains of Polynices; and, that afterwards hastening towards the cave, which had been opened to take Antigone from thence, he heard a voice of a person, whose cries increasing as he approached, he knew to be his son. " Ah! exclaimed he : it is my son I hear : run, fly, enter the cave, deliver me from this horrid doubt." We descended into the cave, but oh, what a shocking spectacle was there presented to our eyes ! Antigone hanging by the fatal knot she had formed of her veil. Hemon held her in his arms, uttering the most affecting lamentations for the death of his mistress, and exclaiming against the cruelty of his father. The king arrives, he sees his son. " Ah, unhappy youth! cries he; what art thou a-

bout to do? what is thy design? by what fatality art thou thus hurried to thy destruction? come out, my son; come out, of this tomb: it is thy father who conjures thee. But Hemon, casting a furious glance at him, disdained his intreaties; and all the answer he made, was to draw his sword, and advance towards him. The king fled. Hemon turning all his rage against himself, pierced his own breast; and embracing Antigone, gave up his life in a torrent of blood in her arms. Thus are the lovers once more united in death! A terrible example of the fatal consequences which attend the unjust anger of kings. Here the officer ends his melancholy narration. Eurydice, who is the mother of Hemon, after having heard it, retires without speaking a word. This affecting silence is very artfully imagined; a more eloquent grief in a mother would have expressed less, and would not have sufficiently prepared us for the event. The Chorus and the officer immediately suspect somewhat of the queen's design. They tremble for her life: a moment afterwards their fears seem groundless: at length they resolve to follow her, that she may not have time to execute her purpose; but, as the old men are hastening after her, they meet Creon, whose despair stops them. This unhappy father holds the body of his son in his arms; and entering, exclaims, "Wretch that I am, what has my madness done? Oh my relentless rigor, to what has it reduced me! Oh Thebans, behold my son, murdered by his own hand! barbarous decree! Oh my son, my dear son, it is I, it is thy father, who has sacrificed both thee and thy bride!"

He acknowledges that his repentance came too late: fruitless repentance, which now tortures him with unutterable pangs. He continues his complaints, till a slave interrupts him, to give him another subject for his tears.

CREON. Ah what can befall me more dreadful?

SLAVE. The queen is dead; she has stabbed herself.

CREON. Oh Pluto, oh ye infernal shades, what delight do you take, in thus afflicting a miserable wretch! what say'st thou? what is it thou hast come to tell me? Ah, art thou come to torment one that is already dead? I am so; speak, what hast thou to declare? that Eurydice has sacrificed herself.

SLAVE. Thou mayst behold her with thine own eyes. Look there.

[*He points to the body of Eurydice,
in the back part of the scene.*]

CREON. Alas! and was this horrible spectacle still in reserve for me?

me? what further woes await me? I hold the body of my son in my arms, and see his mother stretched dead at my feet. Oh my Eurydice, my wife, my son!

SLAVE. It was before this altar, that she gave herself the fatal wound, after having first lamented her former husband, Megarus, and the sad nuptials of her murdered son. Thou oh king, she loaded with imprecations, as a parricide!

CREON. My blood freezes in my veins. Oh friends, why do you not strike? why do you not pierce this breast. [*He has no sword; the Greeks never wore swords at home.*] Into what an abyss of misery am I plunged?

SLAVE. The dying queen declared thou wert thyself the source of all these miseries.

CREON. What was the manner of her death?

SLAVE. After hearing of her son's unhappy fate, she plunged a poniard in her bosom.

CREON. Ah barbarian, I am the only cause of her sad fall! yes, my dear Eurydice, it is I who have sacrificed thee: but I will do justice to myself. Come then, my friends, lead me to death. I am nothing now but a vain shade, a phantom.

After some other sentiments which express his despair, he retires; and the Chorus conclude the piece with a sentence. "Moderation and respect to the Gods, they say, are the chief supports of the felicity of kings; and that a too late repentance, the fruit of great crimes, is the last punishment with which heaven humbles their pride." This is, in effect, the end and design of this tragedy. Creon, intoxicated with the supreme power which he assumed a second time, upon the death of the two sons of Oedipus, abuses it, in the beginning of his reign, to such a degree as to fail in his respect to the infernal deities, and to be guilty of the highest inhumanity to his relations. The chastisement he receives for it opens his eyes; but he is wise too late, and his repentance fruitless.

It cannot be denied, that the whole conduct of this piece is fine; and that, notwithstanding its great simplicity, the passions of terror and pity are carried to the greatest height. The incidents arise one out of the other; and all lead naturally to the end. There is indeed a fault in the too great security of Creon, who, when his son takes his final leave of him, never thinks of ordering him to be detained: yet it ought to be considered, that Creon is at that time so much under the influence of his rage, that in such a state of mind it is natural enough for him, not to suspect that his

son's passion for Antigone is capable of producing so fatal an effect of despair. Besides, this old politician, like the Acomat of Racine, in Bajazet, knows very little of love, and like him he may say after the event,

“ Ah, de tant de conseils, événement sinistre!

“ Prince aveugle, ou plutôt trop aveugle Ministre”, &c.

After all, this fault in the character of Creon, if we must allow it to be a fault, is productive of the grandest catastrophe imaginable. On one side, we have Hemon expiring at the feet of Antigone; on the other, a mother unable to survive her son; not to speak of the situation into which these severe chastisements of heaven throws the wretched Creon; who, notwithstanding his guilt, becomes an object of compassion, when we see him punished as a husband, a father, and a king.

It would not be just to pass over in silence the Antigone of Rotrou, of which the reader has seen some passages here. He has not, like the Italians, made mere translations of the antient pieces, but he has turned them after his own manner, without losing any of the essential scenes. The misfortune is, that in his time, they were ignorant of the rules of the drama, or, what amounts to the same thing, the delicacies of probability. In treating this subject, for example, he was apprehensive that he should want matter; and therefore, instead of beginning his action at the point where Sophocles begins it, that is, immediately after the Thebaid, or the deaths of Polynices and Eteocles, he thought it necessary to blend the two tragedies in one, which is an offence against the unity of action.

He has offended no less against the unities of time and place, rules which were far from being strictly observed in the last age: but even this fault has afforded him the means of adorning his tragedy with some excellent scenes. His first part of his Thebaid extends from the beginning to the third scene of the third act. We shall, in its place, take notice of the tragedies of Euripides, Seneca, and Racine, on the same history. Here we are only to consider the second part of Rotrou's: it is properly a continuation of the Antigone of Sophocles; but all that Sophocles, to preserve the unity of place, throws into narration, Rotrou brings into action. Thus, the deaths of Antigone, Hemon, and Eurydice, which are related in the Greek poet, the French author represents on the stage; but then the audience is transported from the palace to the rock, and there see the actions of Hemon, and the king his father. It is this liberty which has rendered the scenes more animated,

more

more lively, and more striking: love, rage, and despair, speak there with eloquence and dignity; all the characters are well supported to the last, except Ismene's, who concludes the tragedy with these two lines:

“ Lâche ne puis-je donc faire un dernier effort!

“ Mourrai-je mille fois par la peur d'une mort?”

Rotrou has followed Sophocles in representing Ismene prudent and generous; for she is willing to share the crime and the punishment of her sister; but why, on a sudden, degrade her by a single stroke, at the conclusion of the piece? what had this princess to do in the catastrophe? Sophocles has taken care not to introduce her on that occasion. Creon had ordered her to be arrested, but had exempted her from the whole rigour of the law: this was sufficient. In this, and in the other imitations of Rotrou, one cannot but be astonished that this poet, who had certainly a great genius, and was able to understand and translate the ancients, did not rather attend to the more essential parts; that is, to the good sense of those authors who carried their love of probability so far as to sacrifice to it those beauties which their genius offered them, whenever such beauties were out of place.

Rotrou feared above every thing, like the writers of our own time, that extreme simplicity which contents itself with a narrow subject; which, according to the excellent remarks of Boileau*, is much more necessary in tragedy than in epic poetry; which may subsist very well without it. The reason is equal in both cases; as in both cases the probability is better preserved, the attention of the spectator is less divided, his emotions tend more directly, and in a more even train, to one end, the passions are carried on more vehemently, without interuption; and all that can be added beyond this, instead of decorating the action, does but burthen and confuse it. One can say, at least, nothing of the Antigone of Rotrou, or of any of the pieces filled with episodes, but that it is a great and wild history of many facts, which glide successively before the eyes, and of which none leave a lasting impression; because their number is too great, without sufficient connections. Here is indeed a selection of beautiful scenes; but these scenes with all their graces, do not form a whole, either delightful or affecting; and they fail, if I may be allowed to say so, by endeavouring too much to delight and affect. The tragedy of Sophocles, artless as it is, left a deep impression upon the heart, when it was acted at Athens. It was exhibited thirty two times, and its reputation raised the author to the government of Samos.

* Preface to the Lutrin.

O E D I P U S A T C O L O N A.

A

T R A G E D Y o f S O P H O C L E S.

IF we may give credit to Cicero and Valerius Maximus, Sophocles was near a hundred years old when he composed this piece; and yet this alone was sufficient to give him the first rank among the tragic poets. In our time, it will not be thought of as it was by them, unless we enter into the interests of the Athenians, to whom this tragedy must have given great pleasure, because the poet fixes the tomb of Oedipus among them. A glorious and political monument,* which rendered the Athenians formidable to the Thebans. We shall not repeat here what we have already said upon this subject, nor what passed in the senate of Athens, on occasion of that piece.

Oedipus at Colona, is the sequel of the former Oedipus, which the reader has seen in the first part of this work. This blind prince, banished from his kingdom, and forced to wander from country to country, comes by chance to Athens, and stops in a place called Colona, near the temple of the Eumenides. There he calls to mind an oracle which he had received from Apollo; namely, that he should die at Colona; and that his tomb should be to the people of Athens a presage of victory over all their enemies, particularly over the Thebans, if they ventured to attack them. This work was composed by Sophocles, not only in favour

* A long time after this work was composed, I read the Abbe Sallier's learned remarks upon the Oedipus at Colona. (Vol. VI. of the memoirs of literature, p. 385.) It gave me great pleasure to find, that we agreed in the opinion, that this piece is of the kind of those which were allegorical; and in which the spectators saw allusions to the affairs of the times. But, I acknowledge, that the uncertain date of this trage-

dy, and the impossibility of explaining and connecting the allusions in it, with any precise events of the Peloponnesian war, have prevented me from undertaking this explanation, as I have ventured to do of Aristophanes. (See the Abbe Sallier's dissertation.)

† See third discourse in the first part of this work.

of Athens, but to celebrate the place of his birth, which was Colona. The persons of the drama are, Oedipus, Antigone, and Ismena; the daughters of Oedipus; Polynices, one of his sons; Creon, his brother in law; Theseus, king of Thebes; and a Chorus, composed of ancient Athenians. The scene is fixed at the entrance of the temple of the *venerable Goddesses*, to use the phrase of antiquity, that is to say, the Furies.

A C T I.

The scene represents a temple, a sacred grove, with some houses at a distance. An old blind man enters, leaning on the arm of a young woman. This is Oedipus, led by his daughter Antigone. He makes himself known to the audience, by asking to what place he is arrived, what will be the period of his wanderings, and who will deign to receive an unhappy king, rejected by all mankind, who requires but little, and whom fortune has taught to be contented with little? Fatigued with travelling, he desires his daughter to seat him in some place, either sacred or profane; where he may wait in quiet, till he knows how the people of the country will receive an unhappy exile.

Antigone looks around her. She sees a city at a distance, fortified with towers, which she knows to be Athens. She is ignorant of the name of the place where they had stopped; but from the laurel, the olive, and vine, that were planted in it, she concludes it to be sacred: she places her father upon a stone, and as she goes forward, in order to make some discoveries concerning the inhabitants, she is met by a man, who tells Oedipus, that he must instantly remove from the place where he is sitting because the grove is sacred; that no profane person was permitted to enter into it; and that it was consecrated to the daughters of the night, the venerable Eumenides. Oedipus draws a fortunate omen from this intelligence, and puts himself under the protection of these gloomy divinities.

The passenger, seized with terror, neither dares of his own authority to drive a stranger from a sacred place, nor conceal what he has seen: he thinks it his duty to inform the inhabitants. However, Oedipus draws from him some account of the country. It is all consecrated to Prometheus, and to Neptune, who upon striking the ground with his trident, a horse came out of it; and from this it was called the *equestrian colony*. The place where Oedi-

Oedipus happened to stop at first was one of the bulwarks of Athens; and called the iron way, and is the scene described, in which there is nothing interesting to us. Oedipus is also informed, that Athens is governed by a king named Theseus. It is surprising, that a prince like Oedipus, should not know whether a neighbouring state was a republic or a monarchy; but it afterwards appears, that Oedipus asks this question for a feint, that he may not be known, and to gain fuller intelligence. He intreats some of the passengers (for there are several supposed to be there, one of which speaks for the others) to hasten to Theseus and intreat him to come there; and to assure him at the same time, that he will have no cause to repent of this complaisance. "Why, what ser-
"vice, replies the passenger, can a miserable man like you, deprived
"of sight, do to a king?" Oedipus tells him that he will reveal some secrets to Theseus of great consequence to the state. The passenger, astonished at the firmness and resolution of the old man, whom he begins to consider as an illustrious person, persecuted by fortune, runs to inform the inhabitants of Colona of what had happened, and to know of them whether or not this stranger must be forced to quit so venerable a place.

When he is gone, Oedipus addresses himself to the Eumenides, and implores them to be favourable to him, to receive him, and to confirm the oracle he had received from Apollo. That God had predicted to him, that in the temple of the Furies he should find an end of his misfortunes; and that his presence there should be a fatal presage for those who had banished him, and a happy one for them who should receive him. He believes that the Eumenides themselves have invisibly conducted him; since, after so toilsome a journey, their temple offered itself as a retreat for him. "Oh Goddesses, adds he, fulfil this oracle! and if the dreadful miseries which have fallen upon me are by you judged too little for Oedipus to suffer, oh deign to let me taste the quiet of a death so long and earnestly desired. And thou, O Athens! O city, justly respected! have pity on the shade of one who was once a king, and now a wretched exile!"

Antigone interrupts her father, to tell him that she perceives a troop of old men of the country, advancing towards them. The father and the daughter conceal themselves in the thickest part of the grove, that they may hear their discourse. The old men, without knowing him, seek him with the utmost eagerness, as a profane wretch, an exile, a criminal constrained by his ill fortune to pollute

lute by his presence, a place sacred even from the view of mortals. They look round with anxious impatience: Oedipus shews himself again; and the old men, moved to compassion at the sight of a man who does not appear to them to have merited such distresses, cry out to him to quit the sacred grove. They even refuse to hear what he has to say, till he comes from that holy place. All this superstitious ceremony is an artifice of the theatre, and shews in what veneration the Furies were held by the people of Athens. "We must obey," says Antigone to her father; "thou art a stranger here, and therefore ought to fear and respect all that are feared and respected by the inhabitants." In effect, the Greeks had agreed to reverence the divinities and the laws of the countries through which they travelled. Oedipus is accordingly obliged to submit; he consents to quit his asylum, but expresses his apprehension of suffering some insult. The old men assure him of the contrary; and he passes over to the other side, where, assisted by Antigone, he seats himself upon a stone.

All this is written with the utmost simplicity, and it is highly probable that it was acted so likewise. If this scene appears to us to want dignity, it is because our manners are altered: dignity of sentiment is the same now as in the age of Sophocles; but that of manner is very different. We must then determine that dignity of manners is an arbitrary and temporary thing; but that of sentiments is always the same.

The old men interrogate Oedipus, concerning his country and his misfortunes; but he is ashamed to make himself known. "Alas, what hast thou to fear," says his daughter to him! canst thou be more wretched than thou art at present?" The unhappy prince consents to satisfy the impatient curiosity of the Chorus; but he does so, like Phedra, by degrees and with great confusion. *Thou knowest the son of the Amazon*, says Phedra to her confidant. "Have you not heard of the son of Laius, says Oedipus." The Chorus utter a cry of terror and astonishment, and ask him if he is indeed that Oedipus so famous for his misfortunes. He conjures the old men not to look upon him with terror and detestation; but he finds it impossible to calm their minds; and this horror which his name only inspires, completes his misery. "I am then the most wretched of mortals," cries he. "Alas my daughter! what shall we do now?" He has indeed but too just cause for doubt and anxiety; for the Chorus seem ready to retract the promises they had given him, through an apprehension that they shall share his ill

fortune; as if his ill fortune was contagious, and was capable of spreading ruin through all the states where Oedipus appeared.

“ Oh Athenians! says Antigone; you who respect the sacred laws of hospitality, since the voice only of my father, who is less criminal than unfortunate, makes you tremble with horror, yet be not insensible to mine; it is for him that I endeavour to move you with my prayers. Ah, do not reject the supplications of a princess*, who, in your looks can read the motions of your minds; a satisfaction denied my unhappy father! Alas, we have no resource but in you! you hold the place of Gods to us. Do not refuse us a favour which I ask of you in the name of all you hold most dear.”

The Chorus are moved, but religion prevails over their pity.

Oedipus now speaks; and shews the Coloniates that, under the appearance of a misplaced piety, they are in danger of committing a crime. “ What a disgrace, says he, will it be to the Athenians, so celebrated for their benevolence to unhappy strangers, should they refuse to receive a king, afflicted for involuntary crimes! yes, pursues he, I became guilty without my knowledge; and those who have so barbarously banished me from my country are not ignorant of the injustice they have treated me with. Do not, I conjure you, in the name of the Gods, by offering me any insult, violate the public faith upon which I depended when I quitted this sacred asylum: do not dishonour the Gods, under a pretence of honouring them, and conceive that they look with disinterestedness upon the good and the wicked; and that wickedness never escapes the punishment it deserves.”

He desires they will allow him a few moments only, till he has spoke to Theseus. He tells them, that he came to Athens, purified and consecrated by the Gods, to bring the Athenians numberless advantages; that he has it in his power to reward them for the favour they will do him, by not violating in his person the laws of hospitality. The Chorus are prevailed upon by these arguments, to wait till the king is made acquainted with this important affair: important indeed to the Athenians; but, which to us, seems of little consequence. This is the reason, if I may say it once again, which makes this like many ancient pieces; tho’ it be very interesting in itself, improper to affect a modern reader.

* The Abbe Sallier gives another sense to this passage, by a small correction. At *soft bear favourably the request his daughter* makes for him. *Sbe who has not incurred the wrath of heaven.* See vol. V. of the Acad. of Inscr. pag. 81.

While Oedipus is talking to the Chorus, Antigone perceives a woman at a distance mounted on a horse and covered with an umbrella, after the manner of the Theffalian women. As she comes nearer, Antigone thinks she resembles her sister Ismene. Accordingly, it is this princess who alights; and, with transports of tenderness, embraces her father and sister. This meeting is so much the more affecting, as that Ismene had with great difficulty discovered the rout they had taken. She had stolen out of the palace at Thebes, with a faithful attendant, to follow the fortune of an unhappy father. Oedipus, shewing the difference between his sons and his daughters says, that the former have abandoned him, and, like the Egyptians, who stays in their houses and employ themselves in the works of women, while their wives attend to public affairs; so his sons keep themselves concealed in their palaces, and leave their sisters to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, with a banished father.

Oedipus asks what discords at present disturb his family, for he foresees that Ismene comes to bring him fatal news. This princess, without entering into the detail of what she had suffered, in endeavouring to find out her father, relates all that had happened, since the time he was exiled from Thebes. She tells him, that Eteocles and Polynices had been undetermined at first whether they should ascend the throne, or yield it to Creon their uncle, that they might not draw upon Thebes those miseries which attend an incestuous race: but, that afterwards burning with ambition, they conceived a hatred for each other, which nothing can extinguish but their blood. That Eteocles had banished his elder brother Polynices, who had been forced to take refuge in Argos: from whence it was reported, that he was returning, supported by a new alliance, in order to deliver up Thebes as a prey to the Argives. "These are not mere reports only, adds she: "they are well-known facts; and I know not what period the "Gods have decreed for our misfortunes." "How! resumes Oedipus, can you hope that the Gods will ever become propitious to us, and terminate our woes?" "Yes, replies Ismene, I depend upon their Oracles."

OEDIPUS. What Oracles?

ISMENA. The Gods have declared, that thy people, who are guilty of thy banishment, shall seek thee again, either living or dead.

She informs her father, that Creon would soon follow him for this purpose: that he was determined to preserve him, and detain him not in Thebes, but on the frontiers, knowing that his tomb in a foreign land would be fatal to the Thebans: that some deputies lately returned from Delphos had published these oracles; and that her two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, were informed of all. "Ah the traitors!" says Oedipus, they know this; and "their eager desire to reign, renders them insensible to the afflictions of a father:" Here he repeats those terrible imprecations with which he had loaded them both before. "The barbarians blushed not to exile "me, their father; they called this exile voluntary. Poor excuse! "ought they to have listened to the first emotions of a father's despair? Time had begun to calm his griefs; and then it was that "the Thebans executed this inhuman decree. My unnatural sons "were not ashamed to consent to it. They preferred the lustre of "a crown to the interests of a father. It is his sons who have reduced him to the last extremities of poverty and disgrace; too happy to have found some relief in the generous tenderness of his daughters." "Let Creon come then, pursues he, or let him send others after me; they shall not prevail over a mind so greatly irritated. For this I attest the oracles of the Gods. Oh Athenians, give me an asylum; and in me you will acquire a deliverer for Athens, and a more formidable enemy for Thebes!"

This speech, and the oracles, render Oedipus more respectable in the eyes of the Coloniates: they feel themselves disposed to serve him, and begin by advising him to make the necessary expiations to the Eumenides, whose temple he has so profaned. These expiations consisted in pouring libations of water down from three sources; in crowning the sacred cups with wreaths of linen, made of the fleece of a young sheep newly shorn; in pouring libations of pure water, and not of wine; with the face turned towards the sun; and lastly, three times nine branches of olives (a mysterious number) must be offered, praying at the same time to the Eumenides. After which, the person who performs this ceremony must retire backwards out of their temple. Oedipus, whose blindness rendered him incapable of performing such a sacrifice, charges his daughters with it. Ismena undertakes to perform these rites, and confides to her sister Antigone the care of her father.

The Chorus, curious to know the particulars of the misfortunes of Oedipus, intreat him, tho' with some caution, to relate his ad-

ventures. Oedipus seems afraid to open wounds yet scarcely healed; he defends his conduct, and confesses his incest with groans. It was a crime which he committed ignorantly; or rather, which Thebes only committed; since it was that city which placed him on the throne, and in the bed of his mother. The murder of Laius was as involuntary as his incest. In fine, it is only by broken words, and with the most artless confusion, that Oedipus recounts these two horrible adventures; which must produce an effect which our manners cannot admit, and our language cannot express.

A C T II.

Theseus at length arrives at Colona. He addresses a speech to Oedipus of the same kind with that of Dido to Eneas. As a king he compassionates the misfortunes of a king. He offers him all his power for a support, and his kingdom for a retreat. "Constrained to wander himself, exposed to innumerable dangers, he has learnt but too well to feel the miseries of others: to be the protector of strangers, and the unfortunate, is a law he has prescribed to himself, convinced that according to the course of human affairs, he may become wretched in his turn; and that nothing is less certain, than the events which the next day is to bring upon us." This is the thought of Dido. Virg. Eneid, B. 2. v. 630.

"Non ignari mali miseris succurrere disco".

Virg. Eneid,
l. 2. v. 630.

Oedipus, transported with joy and gratitude for so kind a reception, answers, by acknowledging his generosity; and the only favour he implores is a tomb. "It is to be a bulwark to Athens," says he, that I bring my ashes hither; after my death the true value of this benefit will be known."

Theseus kindly answers, "Why art thou solicitous for a tomb, and regardless of thy life? will so poor a service from me content thee?" Oedipus forewarns Theseus, that this favour will draw upon him some bloody wars; and that Thebes will demand him. "If Thebes should solicit thy return, says the king of Athens, it will not be fit for thee to live in exile." Oedipus replies, That this ungrateful country had banished him, when he had no thoughts of ever quitting it; and perceiving the Athenian monarch to be astonished at his fortitude and resolution, in circumstances so distressful,

stressful, " Ah, Theseus, says he, thou seest a king who bends underneath the weight of many sorrows!"

THESEUS. Dost thou mean thy former misfortunes, which—

OEDIPUS. No, they are the common discourse of all Greece.

THESEUS. What greater misfortunes have fallen upon thee then?

OEDIPUS. I have been banished from my own country, as a parricide, by my own children.

THESEUS. But they intend to recal thee

OEDIPUS. They are forced to it by an oracle.

THESEUS. Who do they fear?

OEDIPUS. Thou. Athens will be fatal to them. [Theseus deprived Creon of the scepter; and there is likewise some allusion to the affairs of the Peloponnesus.]

THESEUS. Ha! what will be the cause of this revolution?

OEDIPUS. My dear Theseus, none but the Gods are exempted from the vicissitudes of fortune. All nature is subject to decay and death. The powerful hand of time overthrows all. The earth loses insensibly her fertility. Age deprives bodies of their strength and vigour. Even fidelity itself expires; and from its ashes treachery is born. Friends and allies are not always united by the same ties. That which once pleased us becomes disgusting, and again resumes its former charms. All things are subject to change. Thebes and Athens are now allied, and in perfect peace; but a day will come, and succeeding years shall bring that fatal day, when discord, breaking the bands of this happy union, shall from one slight circumstance produce a cruel war. Then either Jupiter and Apollo are no longer powerful, or my cold ashes shall be watered with Theban blood. But let us not presume to draw the veil: let us reverence the secrets of heaven. I return to my first request: preserve the faith you have given me inviolate; and if we may depend upon the oracles of the Gods, Athens shall not repent of having granted an asylum to such a suppliant as Oedipus.

The Chorus declare that Oedipus spoke to them in the same terms when he first arrived: and Theseus answers, " Is it possible
" that I can despise such an alliance? This altar, consecrated to
" hospitality, and so awful a part of our worship, would not per-
" mit it. The venerable Goddesses have themselves given an asy-
" lum to Oedipus: and the service he renders to me and my peo-
" ple are too important to suffer me to refuse the hand of such a
" hero.

“ hero. I therefore decree to him an asylum in my kingdom.
 “ Chuse, Oedipus, whether thou wilt fix thy residence here, and I will
 “ command the inhabitants to defend thee, or whether thou wilt
 “ come with me to my palace*. Thus it is that Theseus endea-
 “ vours to acknowledge, and to merit the benefit thou conferest
 “ upon him.”

Oedipus expresses his gratitude in the strongest terms; but prefers Colona for the place of his residence, because there it was that the oracle had declared he should take vengeance on the Thebans. He will not even bind Theseus by the usual oaths; and Theseus on his side, answers like a king, “ That his word is more sacred than the most solemn oaths; and that Oedipus has nothing to apprehend from Creon: that no person will dare to attempt to force him away: that he leaves him in the hands of faithful subjects: and that the name only of Theseus will prove a sufficient guard for him.”

The Coloniates, who compose the Chorus, console Oedipus for his banishment, by praises of the new country into which he is admitted as a citizen. Here the poet gives us a panegyric upon Attica. He extols its fertility, its beauty, and its wealth; he does not forget Minerva's olive, the pledge of this divinity's protection, nor the horses for which Attica is indebted to Neptune; as well as the fine state of their marine, so greatly superior to that of any other nation of Greece. This flattering picture for the Athenians forms the second interlude.

A C T III.

Antigone perceives a numerous body of men at a distance; and soon after distinguishes Creon at their head. “ Now is the time, “ oh Attica! says she, that we must put this celebrated valour to “ the proof.” The Coloniates endeavour to remove the fears of the princess; and Creon begins his speech. He protests he is not come to offer them any violence or injustice: that he demands Oedipus in the name of the whole Theban nation; and declares, that he in particular is grieved to see a great king forced to wander from place to place, accompanied by a young princess, who, for-

* Thus Pelasgus, in the Suppliants of Echylus, leaves it to the choice of the Da-

nades, whether they will reside in his palace, or in any other place.

getful of her sex and rank, exposes herself to the necessity of being wherewithal to support a miserable life. "Unhappy that I am! adds he, I have not been able to conceal this disgrace to our name. Alas! it is too public not to be often a subject of reproach to us. I conjure thee, therefore, dear Oedipus, in the name of the Gods, to forget what is past, return to Thebes, and hide our infamy from the sight of Greece: be contented with paying thy thanks to this city for the humanity with which it has received thee: follow us, and let thy affection for thy native country prevail over thy gratitude to Athens."

We find by this speech, and by several other circumstances before, that all exiles, even tho' they had formerly been kings, were reduced to a situation almost as wretched as that of Belifarius; at least, they were in danger of being reduced to it: especially Oedipus, who was loaded with the curses of Gods and men. We find, likewise, that this harangue of Creon's, was a political artifice; and therefore Oedipus answers him in these terms:

"Rash and designing prince, what a snare hast thou laid for me! dost thou pretend to recal me, only to load me with new misfortunes? When I demanded banishment, I was plunged in the deepest despair; why didst thou then deny me what I solicited as a favour? why didst thou wait till my griefs were assuaged, and had given place to the love of my country; and then banish me with ignominy? no considerations of kindred could soften thy cruelty. But now, when thou seest me under the protection of a powerful state, thou makest use of false professions of kindness, to deceive me, and snatch me from her hospitable bosom. All these benefits avail me little, when I am not disposed to receive them! This is like offering a wealthy man that assistance thou deniedst him in his poverty. What am I to think of such services? Thou camest to force me away, not to replace me on my throne, but to confine me on the frontiers of Thebes. Thou art afraid of Athens, and thou dreadest the consequences of my stay in this country. Away, I will no longer listen to thee. My bad Demon will pursue thee still; and my ungrateful sons shall find Thebes the scene only of their combat and their death. Thinkest thou I am not sufficiently informed of the destiny of Thebes? Jupiter and Apollo will prove my words to be true. Carry thy flatteries elsewhere; their hidden gall will be thy own misfortune: no thou shalt never move my heart. Away, and leave me to pass the remainder of my days in this happy land. My destiny, wretched as it is, must needs appear fortunate

nate

nate to me, since it is capable of exciting envy." Creon becomes enraged at this refusal; Oedipus reproaches him; they proceed to threats, and from threats to violence. It is Creon who brings matters to this extremity; and, who at length discovering his bad designs, declares that he has already surprised and carried off Ismene; and that he will also force Antigone from Oedipus. "Remember," says he to them, and to the Chorus, that if you fall into my power, you have been the aggressors." Oedipus, justly alarmed at his menaces, implores assistance; and protests against the violence that is offered him. The old men reproach Creon for his unfiendly conduct; and threaten him with the resentment of Theseus. He raises his voice, as knowing his superior strength, on account of the numbers that attended him. In vain do they represent to him the unreasonableness of his procedure: he pretends he has a right to claim the princesses of his blood. Antigone cries out for aid in vain; notwithstanding the weak efforts of the Chorus, to prevent it, she is forced away. This scene, if we may judge by the expressions, must have been very much animated. Creon, made furious by the obstacles he meets with, although they are very inconsiderable, contemns the small number of Coloniates who oppose him, and threatens to carry off Oedipus himself. The unhappy prince has no resource but in his own fortitude. He loads his barbarous brother-in-law with imprecations; while Antigone is dragged away, without being permitted to give her father a last embrace.

After this act of violence, Theseus unexpectedly appears. He had been offering a sacrifice to Neptune, at a small distance. The Coloniates hastened to him, and interrupted the solemnity, to inform him of the danger Oedipus was in. As soon as he heard of the hostility committed by the Thebans, he gave orders to one of his officers, to assemble some horse and infantry with all speed, and block up the passes, that the ravishers might not escape. On his entrance, he turns towards Creon, and tells him, that if like him, he was disposed to listen only to the dictates of his rage, he would treat him as a foe; but, that he would content himself with keeping him as a hostage, till the princesses were brought back. He adds, with becoming dignity, "The action thou hast committed, is injurious to me, and unworthy of thy rank and country. What presumption! to come into a state governed by wise laws, and to violate justice by an impious rape! didst thou imagine Attica was filled with slaves or cowards? or did I appear to thee as

a weak and contemptible prince, unable to make myself respected. It is not from Thebes that thou hast borrowed these pernicious maxims. The Thebans are lovers of justice; and when they shall know that Creon came into Attica to trample upon her laws, to profane her sacred asylums, and to force from her protection, suppliants already but too miserable, they will take care to shew how greatly they disapprove of such an attempt."

Creon answers with much seeming moderation, that his idea of Attica was very different from that which Theseus imparted to him: but that he did not imagine this state would retain persons of his family in spite of him; nor give a retreat to one loaded with the crimes of parricide and incest. Oedipus, enraged at these imputations, justifies himself in the same manner as he had done before; and shews how little he has merited them. He afterwards confounds Creon, by asking him how he dares to reproach him with the infamy of a wife, who was his sister? "Neither I nor she knew, says he, that she gave sons to her son. The very remembrance fills me with horror; yet thou canst calmly reproach me with a crime, the shame of which falls upon her and thee."

Theseus puts an end to this dispute, by commanding Creon, (for he speaks to him as his judge) to come to him and deliver up the two princesses; and promises Oedipus that he will restore his daughters to him, and take vengeance for the insult he had suffered.

After his departure, the Chorus, as the people, represent the restless politics of subjects who take advantage of the slightest incident, to spread the report of a war, and make it the topic of conversation. He who speaks for the others, expects impatiently the event of a battle, which he supposes must inevitably happen, between the Theban party and the troops of Theseus. He draws a pleasing picture of it, which flatters and amuses him. He thinks he already sees the soldiers engaged in fight, and the victorious Athenians forcing their prey from the ravishers: he wishes himself a bird, that he may be an eye witness of this action; and he invokes the Gods to crown it with success.

A C T IV.

Theseus returns victorious, bringing with him Antigone and Ismena. The mutual joy of the father and daughters for their unexpectedly meeting again, is expressed with a beautiful simplicity. Oedipus embraces them, and desires them to give him a short account

count of what had happened to them since their last separation. "For (says he to them) it is becoming your fortune and your youth, to use few words." Brevity and strength of discourse are often praised in this piece, and in the other Greek tragedies. This is not to be wondered at. The Greeks were both by art and nature excellent speakers; and they all valued themselves upon their skill in the use of words.

And here it is a singular decorum: for Oedipus apologizes to Theseus for dwelling so little upon the great obligations he owes him; and for suffering his tenderness for his children to break out before his gratitude to him. This very tenderness is his excuse. He intreats Theseus to permit a profane wretch, an unhappy criminal, to embrace a king so generous and so just. The answers of Theseus are full of civility, and that good sense and decency of expression upon which the Greeks so particularly valued themselves. He informs Oedipus at the same time of a new incident, which, tho' inconsiderable in appearance, ought not to be neglected. "A stranger, he says, had retired to the altar of Neptune, and required to see Oedipus."

Antigone and her sister immediately guess this stranger to be Polynices, their brother. They acquaint their father with their suspicions, who at first refuses to see him: but the princesses join their intreaties with those of Theseus, to prevail upon him to relent, and suffer at least the sight and discourse of a son who comes not like Creon to offer him any insult, but who has assumed the manners of a suppliant. Oedipus yields at length to their importunity; but determines not to be softened into a forgiveness of him. Upon which, the Chorus make a long moral reflection upon human passions, and the miseries they introduce into life: from whence they recur to the miseries of age, and of the different periods of life which bring us to it. It is a little ode, as heathenish as several other French odes on the same subject. They hold it preferable either not to be born at all, or to die in infancy. This little interval is finely produced to give time for Polynices to arrive.

This ungrateful son, with tears in his eyes, and trembling agitation, approaches his father, whose gloomy air and silent rage foretel an unfavourable reception. He therefore addresses himself to his sisters first. "What shall I do, my dear sisters, says he to them? "Shall I begin with deplored my own misfortunes, or those which my father and you have suffered?" He is moved at the miserable

ble condition in which he finds his father and his king. He sees him in a mourning habit, suitable to his misfortunes, with the two princesses, his daughters, so altered by the hardships they have endured, that even a brother can scarcely know them. He laments that he has been too late informed of their sad situation : he reproaches himself for it. He generously solicits a pardon from them, without being able to pardon himself. "Thou art silent, oh my father ! says he: speak, I conjure thee speak ; do not throw a tender son into despair: shall I gain nothing by this painful journey, but a cruel silence ? will not my father deign to tell me the cause of his anger ? Oh you his daughters so tenderly beloved, endeavour to soften his heart ! prevail with him not to dismiss unanswered, and with disdain, a son who is come under the auspices of Neptune, to soften his indignation."

The eldest sister advises her brother to begin, by telling the occasion of his journey ; because in reality every discourse, whether it produces piety or any other emotion, at least enforces an answer, were it only by importunity. This is the reason that she gives ; and Polynices takes her counsel.

"Well, says he, I will speak ; but first I implore the God whose altar was my asylum : it was under his auspices, and upon the faith of Theseus, that I have ventured to come hither. Oh may the Gods touch my father's heart, that he may hear me favourably ! Know then, oh my father, that I live banished from my native country ! This punishment I have drawn upon myself, for claiming the crown, as the eldest of thy sons. Eteocles has carried it against me ; not by the right of birth, nor by his superior courage, nor by his virtues ; it is by his artifices alone that he has gained the Thebans. To me therefore it is but too certain that thy imprecations have been fatal ; and the ministers of the Gods confirm this truth. I took refuge in Argos ; and, supported by the alliance of Adrastus, to whose daughter I am married, I have engaged all the chiefs of that country in my interest, who have all sworn either to perish with me before Thebes, or to drive the usurper thence." Here Polynices names the seven chiefs, and gives a short account of each. "It is in the name of these heroes, adds he, that I come to implore thy returning tenderness ; and that thou wouldest reserve thy anger for a brother who has banished me from my country. The Oracle has declared, that the party thou favourest shall be victorious. Oh listen then Oedipus to my prayers ! I conjure thee by the rivers of Thebes, and by the Gods of our race, to restore me thy

thy paternal affection. We are both exiles; both constrained to solicit succours from strangers: we are alike miserable; while a traitor, who has usurped the crown, enjoys the fruits of his crimes, and insults our common misfortunes. Deign only to consent to it, and I shall conquer; but I will conquer only for thee. I shall return into my country: I shall banish the tyrant, and acquire immortal honour; but if thou abandonest me, I must perish."

The Chorus, without suffering themselves to be prejudiced in favour of Polynices, wait the answer of Oedipus, in order to join with him. Oedipus takes no notice of Polynices, but addresses himself to the Chorus.

" That traitor, says he, may thank Theseus for hearing my voice once more: it is to the king's solicitations that I sacrifice my reluctance; but the words he will hear from me will not be such as he has presumed to hope for. Wretch! when thou wast possessed of the throne, which Eteocles has forced from thee, didst not thou thyself banish thy father? Is it not thou who hast reduced me to this condition, the sight of which now draws thy interested tears? It is for thy own miseries, not mine, that thou weeppest. Away, I do not lament my own misfortunes; I can support them with fortitude: I live, but live to hate a parricide like thee. Thou who hast dethroned me, thou who hast plunged me into the distresses thou weeppest for, thou who hast forced me to depend on others for the support of an unfortunate life, my only resource has been in the tenderness and fortitude of my daughters; but it was not thy fault that I have not been abandoned by them, and left to wander comfortless and alone. Go, ye barbarous brothers, ye are no longer my sons; and thou traitor know, that if the Gods have spared thee hitherto, yet thy punishment is not far distant: thy allies will march to Thebes, but do not hope to possess that kingdom. Ungrateful pair, ye shall both perish miserably; bathed in each others blood. Such are the curses * with which I have loaded you; and which I now repeat: Yes, ye Fu-

* Plato, on two occasions, mentions the imprecations of Oedipus against his children: in the second dialogue of Alcibiades, he compares those who are ignorant of what they are going to implore of the Gods to the imprudent Oedipus. In the eleventh

book of laws, he says, that almost all the curses of parents upon their children are heard, as appears by Oedipus, Amyntor, and many others; and that their blessings will be granted with yet more certainty.

ries, I implore your vengeful arm, to strike these unnatural sons; that they may learn what reward is due to those who outrage an unhappy father, whose miseries his daughters only have beheld with tenderness and pity. It is these daughters whose piety deserves that throne, so eagerly contested for. The Goddess of justice, who is seated at the hand of Jupiter, is surety to them for the truth of my prediction. Go execrable son, go, loaded with the curses of a father; and bear with thee to the shades this dreadful fate, which I imprecate upon thee. Mayst thou soon behold the horrid issue of that war, which thou art preparing to carry into the bosom of thy country! mayst thou never more return to Argos! mayst thou and thy impious brother, fall mangled by mutual wounds! may gloomy Tartarus be thy portion! These are my last prayers, ye terrible Eumenides! and thou oh Mars! who hast poisoned their hearts with this unnatural hate, make haste and fulfill my curses! Go wretch, fly from my presence, thou knowest my last will; and let the Thebans and thy faithful allies know what an inheritance the injured Oedipus has bequeathed his impious sons."

POLYNICES. Oh fatal journey! oh my unhappy allies! under what auspices are we going to Thebes? alas! I cannot reveal this horrid mystery to them; and yet I am no longer at liberty to delay the war. Let me die then, and my fatal secret die with me. Oh my sisters! ye who have heard the horrid imprecations of my father; if your return to Thebes is as certain as my misfortunes, give me, I conjure you in the name of the Gods, give me, at least the honours of a funeral; and by this pious duty, you will shew yourselves to be as tender sisters, as you are pious and affectionate daughters.

ANTIGONE. Oh hear me Polynices!

POLYNICES. What wouldst thou have me do?

ANTIGONE. Lead back thy army to Argos; and do not ruin thy country and thy self.

POLYNICES. It is impossible. How could I have assembled my allies, if I had suffered them to perceive the least sign of fear in me?

ANTIGONE. And what advantage dost thou hope to gain, by thus following the dictates of thy implacable hatred? of what use will it be to thee to destroy thy country?

POLYNICES. It would be shameful for me to recoil now; and become the scorn of a brother whom I ought to command.

AN-

ANTIGONE. Reflect on the fatal oracles thou hast this moment heard; by them, thou and thy brother are doomed to death.

POLYNICES. I feel the whole sad weight of them: but oh! 'tis hard to yield.

ANTIGONE. Alas, my brother! and with such predictions, who will follow thy colours?

POLYNICES. I know how to be silent, when necessity requires it. The art of a general is to make public none but fortunate presages, and to conceal those that are bad.

ANTIGONE. Thou art determined then to rush upon thy ruin?

POLYNICES. The die is thrown, seek not to alter my purpose: fatal as this expedition will be, I fly to it with eagerness. I will either brave my father's imprecations, or fulfil my wretched destiny: but if thou payest a dead brother those duties which he cannot expect from thee during his life, may the Gods be ever propitious to thee. Detain me no longer. Adieu my dear sisters, you will never see me more.

ANTIGONE. Miserable wretch that I am!

POLYNICES. Oh stop these tears Antigone!

ANTIGONE. Can I be so insensible as not to weep for a brother, who throws himself deliberately upon certain death?

POLYNICES. Well, if it must be so, I know how to die.

ANTIGONE. Ah cruel Polynices! no thou shalt not die: thou wilt listen to my advice.

POLYNICES. Do not advise thy brother to become a coward.

ANTIGONE. Ah, we must be deprived of thee then!

POLYNICES. Our good or bad fortune depends not on ourselves. The Gods are masters of our destinies. I conjure them to render yours as happy as you both deserve*.

Here he tears himself from their arms; and it must be observed that Theseus, through decency, is not present at this interview between the father and the son; nor in this last scene, during which the brother and sisters are at a small distance from Oedipus, who

* The more this scene shall be examined, the more beautiful and purely natural it will be found: it is the fate of excellent things, to create no surprize at the first views; to become more striking at the second, and always to appear more beautiful every time they are examined.

is supposed not to hear this discourse. Polynices departs: the Coloniates hear the thunder roll; they are apprehensive that it presages some misfortune, which Oedipus has drawn upon them: but this prince, like a man inspired, considers the thunder as an augury of his approaching death: so that he desires his daughter and the Chorus to give immediate notice to Theseus. The thunder continues; and its redoubled peals, so full of unusual horror, strike the old men with religious awe*.

A C T V.

Theseus, who had been sent for, arrives: he asks whether Oedipus, or the sudden storm has been the occasion of that consternation, in which he beholds the whole assembly. Oedipus, with a prophetic air, informs them, that the Gods call him by the voice of the thunders and the winds: that, to fulfil the promise he made to Theseus and the city of Athens, of being always their defender, he goes, he says, without a guide, blind as he is, to the place where he is to resign his breath. Theseus alone is to be entrusted with the secret of his tomb, which he is never to reveal till he is near his end; and then only to his successor, to be transmitted with the like precautions, to all the future kings of Athens. It is upon this condition, that the tomb of Oedipus will become the most solid bulwark of the Athenian state. “But I perceive, continues “this prince, that fate and the Gods hasten my departure to the “appointed place. Let us go then without fear: follow me my “daughters, for I will serve you for a guide, as you have been mine “till this moment. Leave me; support me not, I need no as-“sistance to lead me to the place where the earth is to open her “bosom for me. This is the path---Follow me. Mercury and “the Goddess of Hell are my conductors. O sun! which has “been so long invisible to me, I quit thee for the regions of eternal “night. Mayst thou my dear Theseus and the generous Atheni-“ans be ever happy; and in your prosperity, sometimes remember “Oedipus.”

* Sophocles (says Longinus on the Sublime, translated by W. Smith A. M.) has succeeded nobly in his images when he describes his Oedipus in all the agonies of approaching death; and burying himself in the midst of a prodigious tempest, when he

gives us a sight of the apparition of Actiles upon his Tomb (this tragedy is lost) at the departure of the Greeks from Troy. But I know not whether any one has described that apparition more divinely than Simonides.

He departs; and the Chorus, in two short Stanzas, make vows to heaven, to procure this wonderful stranger a short and easy passage to the mansions of the dead. We shall see presently, that the events are too numerous to have happened with probability, in so short a time; and this precipitation of the action can be justified only, by supposing that the ode was prolonged by the enchantment of the spectator, who, already astonished at a prodigy so unthought of, expects the issue of it with impatience.

This issue is the singular death of Oedipus; the person who comes to relate it says, that Oedipus had arrived without any guide to a precipice in a road divided into several paths, where Theseus and Pirithous had sworn an eternal fidelity: that having seated himself upon a stone, he laid aside his mourning vestments, and commanded his daughters to bring him some water from a neighbouring fountain: that after he was purified, he cloathed himself with a robe, such as is put upon the dead, when immediately the earth began to tremble. The princesses drowned in tears, beat their breasts, and hung on his knees; he embraced them, and said, "My daughters you have no longer a father; my last moment is come. Happy in sparing you for the future those toils which I must have cost you, but which your tenderness for me would have softened, I have carried the gratitude of a father as far as it could go, but now I quit you for ever."

He adds, that at these words all who were present burst into tears and cries, which were followed by a profound silence; when a voice from heaven was heard to say, "Oedipus why do you delay?" Immediately that prince called Theseus, and recommended the two princesses to him, after having first embraced them; he then commanded them to remove to some distance, that they might not behold a death which by the express order of the Gods, Theseus alone was to be a witness of. The whole assembly retired likewise; and a few moments afterwards, looking up, they no longer saw Oedipus, but Theseus alone, who had covered his face as if his sight had been dazzled with a celestial object. No person knew what kind of death Oedipus had suffered; but supposed the earth had opened itself gently to receive him, without violence and pain.

Antigone and Ismena return, inconsolable for the loss of a father whom they so tenderly loved. They would fain go back in search of his body or his tomb; but this duty they are not per-

mitted to perform. The Chorus undertake to comfort them ; but they are affected with nothing but the remembrance of Oedipus. Theseus comes, and by his presence and friendly offers, in some degree softens their grief. Being under a necessity to refuse leading them to the tomb of their father, they conjure him at least to conduct them safe to Thebes, that they may prevent a cruel war between their brothers ; and if possible, hinder them from being the murderers of each other. Theseus, from his regard to Oedipus, promises them all they desire ; and the play concludes.

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T R A G E D Y O F S O P H O C L E S.

NOTHING is more celebrated in ancient fable, than Hercules and his twelve labours. This hero was the son of Jupiter and Alcmena, whom the God seduced under the form of Amphitrión, a Theban prince, the husband of Alcmena. Juno was so enraged at the infidelity of her husband, that she took a cruel revenge upon Hercules. She made him subject to Euristheus, king of Mycene, who by laying upon him commands which no other but Hercules could have executed, gave occasion for those great exploits so much boasted of in antiquity. It is not our business here to separate the history from the fable, nor to distinguish the several Hercules's, whose heroic actions have been all attributed to the Hercules of Greece. It is sufficient for the tragedy now before us, if we follow the ideas received by the Greeks.

The exposition of this piece, the subject of which is the death of Hercules, will explain by degrees the principal actions of this hero, and such only as are necessary for the better understanding the action of the drama. The rest would be a train of erudition as useless as easy to compile. It would take off the attention from the substance of this tragedy, on which it had better be employed.

The scene is laid in Trachine *, a city of Thessaly; and the Chorus being an assembly of the virgins of that country, the play takes its name from them. The other persons of the Drama, are Dejanira, the wife of Hercules, and daughter of Æneas, king of Etolia; Hyllus, her son; an old man; a messenger; Lychas, an officer belonging to Hercules; and Hercules himself.

* Trachine, or Trachin, a city of Pythos, was afterwards called Heraclea, because in Thessaly, at the foot of mount Oeta. It Hercules burnt himself upon mount Oeta.

ACT I.

Dejanira opens the scene alone; she recalls to remembrance all the misfortunes of her life, the source of which is her anxious tenderness for her husband. Dejanira is here a jealous wife, such as Ovid* paints her in his heroic epistles, where the whole subject of this play of Sophocles is elegantly expressed in a letter only from this princess to her husband: she who was the daughter of a powerful monarch, she says, had a river for a lover, a deity indeed, but terrible on account of the various forms he assumed. Sometimes he appeared as an ox, sometimes a serpent, and sometimes a man, but such a man as the painters represent the River Gods, that is, with horns and a large beard, on which the water poured from his mouth. A lover of the same kind as the river Achelous, extremely disagreeable to Dejanira, who preferred death to such a husband. Fortunately for her, a powerful rival came to deliver her from the persecutions of the River God. Hercules was this new lover, who vanquished the river, and deprived him of one of his horns, as we read in the Metamorphoses †

We must be contented to swallow these fables, if we would understand the writers of antiquity. The truth which is concealed under them justifies the ancients; but this truth is of little consequence in the tragedy of Sophocles, since the fable is the soul and the ornament of it. Dejanira then becomes the wife of her deliverer; but she complains that she is not more happy: other cares, other disquiets fill her bosom, and love still the cause; for Hercules is a hero who is perpetually travelling through cities and nations, who flies from one victory to another, and whose country is the whole earth. Dejanira and her children see him seldamer than any one else. He exposes himself to innumerable dangers, and leaves them in perpetual alarms. Ovid had this passage of Sophocles in his view, in the following verses

† “ Non honor est, sed onus; species læsura ferentem,
 “ Si qua voles aptè nubere, nube pari.
 “ Vir mihi semper abest, & conjugè notior hospes;
 “ Monstraque, terribiles persequiturque feras.
 “ Ipsa domo vacuâ votis operata pudicis
 “ Torqueor, infesto ne vir ab hoste cadat.

* Ovid's Heroic, epistle 9. † Ovid's Met. lib. 9. ‡ Ovid's Heroic, epistle 9:

“ Inter

" Inter serpentes, aprosque, aydosque leones

" Jactor, & esuros terna per ora canes.

* " But as extremes do very ill agree,
 The greatness of my husband lessens me ;
 This seeming honour gives a mortal wound,
 Amongst our equals happiness is found.
 At home in quiet they their lives enjoy ;
 Tumults and wars, do all his hours employ :
 This absence makes me so unfortunate,
 I buy your glory at too dear a rate.
 I weary heaven with vows and sacrifice
 Lest you should fall by beast or enemies.
 When you assault a lion or wild boar,
 You hazard much, but I still hazard more."

At length Dejanira lets the audience know, that she and her son live at Trachine in banishment.

The occasion of this exile was the death of a child, a relation of Oeneus. The great Alcides having invited his father-in-law to a feast, happened to kill the child as he was playing with him. This accident was not imputed to him as a crime: but Hercules thought himself obliged rigorously to observe the law of the Greeks; and therefore voluntarily banished himself and his family for a year. He chose Trachine for the place of his exile; and thither he conducted Dejanira and her children, whom he confided to the care of Ceyx king of Trachine. This banishment fills her with grief, and is the more insupportable as she has not for a whole year heard any tidings of Hercules. A writing he left with her at parting augments her fears and her disquiets.

One of her women now enters; and, to calm her anxiety, ventures to advise her to send Hyllus, the eldest son of Hercules, to seek his father, or at least to enquire what is become of him. Hyllus arrives very seasonably; and his mother having imparted to him the advice that had been given her, the young prince tells her, that it is reported Alcides his father had been a long time the slave of Omphale, queen of Lydia; that he had at length freed himself from this shameful bondage, and had formed the design of carrying the war into Eubea against Eurytus. " But dost thou know, my son, says Dejanira, what oracles thy father when he departed left with me concerning this expedition? This is their import. He shall perish in this war; or, at length restored to himself, he

* Ovid's Epistles, published by Mr. Dryden.

shall for the future enjoy a happier destiny. Thou seest in what a situation this hero is upon whom our fate depends : for if we lose him, we are undone ; and while he lives we are but too happy. Canst thou belong irresolutethen, whether thou should'st to go to his assistance?" "I will hasten to him instantly, answers Hyllus ; and had I known this oracle relating to my father, I had long e'er this been with him. But although that constant success which has attended his arms ought to remove our fears, yet will I depart, and inform myself of every thing that concerns a person so dear to us." "Depart my son, says the mother ; blush not for an undertaking which tho' long delayed, is necessary."

A troop of young virgins of Trachine appears at that instant in the vestibule of Ceyx's palace, where the scene is laid. They seek Dejanira ; and, anxious for the safety of Hercules, they implore the Sun to make known to this afflicted wife the fate of her husband. These virgins, as has been before observed, form the Chorus, who from this time are present during the whole action. She who speaks for the rest, grieved to see Dejanira a prey to the most racking fears, and so long deprived of the soft comforts of sleep, endeavours to console her. These consolations are only the common-places scattered through the ancients, upon the instability of fortune, the mixture of good and evil in human affairs, and the soothing charms of hope ; but all this is turned in a manner wonderfully beautiful.

Dejanira, affected with the tenderness of these young virgins, replies, that they are yet ignorant of the inevitable cares which marriage brings along with it : cares which their youth has exempted them from hitherto ; but that they will one day know by experience, the grief and anxiety which a tender wife suffers in the absence of a beloved spouse : the disquiets she feels on her children's account, and a thousand other distresses. This sentiment Racine, full of his admired Sophocles, has put into the mouth of Andromache, in his speech to Hermione. Act the third, scene the fourth.

" --- Il me reste un fils, vous sçaurez quelque jour,
 " Madame, pour un fils jusqu'où va notre amour :
 " Mais vous ne sçaurez pas, au moins je le souhaite,
 " En quel trouble mortel son intérêt nous jette.
 " Lorsque de tant de biens qui pouvoient nous flatter
 " C'est le seul qui nous reste, & qu'on veut nous l'ôter."

Deja-

Dejanira determines to acquaint her confidant with a circumstance which particularly torments her. This is a writing which Hercules left with her at his departure. It is indeed his last testament in form. "Till this last sad parting, says she, he always left me like a hero who goes to an assured victory; but here he speaks like a dying husband. He regulates my inheritance: he bequeaths his dominions to his sons; and fixes a certain period, beyond which we are not to hope for his return." This period was fifteen months, and this is the last day. Besides she repeats to the Chorus the oracle which she had beforementioned to her son, and which was given Hercules by the doves, in the forest of Dodona. "It is these melancholy presages, says she, which will not permit me to close my eyes: in sleep I am incessantly tormented with the fear of being so wretched as to survive my hero." These certainly are sentiments uncommonly noble and tender.

The subject being thus insensibly explained by these agitations of her mind, the Chorus perceive a man coming forwards, crowned with leaves; a fortunate presage. Accordingly he is a citizen, who having met Lychas, an officer belonging to Hercules, coming to acquaint Dejanira that her husband was returning triumphant, and loaded with the spoils of his enemies, hastened before him to bring the welcome news to the queen himself. "Thou wilt soon see him, says he, crowned with laurels, at the head of his victorious army." Dejanira asks why Lychas did not come himself, to inform her of her husband's happy return. The man tells her, that the people, impatient to know the circumstances of such wonderful success, detained him unwillingly, till he had satisfied their curiosity. Dejanira resigns herself up to a joy so much the greater and more difficult to be expressed as her grief had been violent. She invites the Chorus to take part in her gladness; and this affords matter for a short interlude, which is nothing more than a triumphal song, in honour of Diana, Apollo, and Bacchus.

ACT II.

Lychas arrives, and gives the queen a circumstantial account of what the other had related in two words. Hercules had sacked the city of Oechalia*, killed Eurytus, and brought away a great

* Oechalia, an ancient city of Thessaly, of which Eurytus was king.

number of prisoners of both sexes, whom he sent before him to his queen : accordingly they are seen at the bottom of the stage, with a young princess at their head.

Hercules, says Lychas, entered into this war to take vengeance on Eurytus, king of Oechalia, who had so far violated the laws of hospitality, as to use the most injurious language to him at a feast, and to banish him shamefully from his palace, which was the cause of this hero's resentment. Meeting a certain person named Iphitus, upon the top of a rock, he in his rage threw him down, without giving him time to defend himself. It is astonishing that Sophocles should impute such baseness to his hero, even in a feigned recital. Lychas adds, that this was the only error Hercules suffered himself to commit ; and that Jupiter, who would have pardoned him, if he had attacked his enemy by open force, had punished him for yielding to this impulse of rage, by subjecting him to Omphale, queen of Lydia, during a whole year. That at length Alcides having reached the promontory of Cenæum, was employed in offering sacrifices there to Jupiter, in acknowledgment for his victory ; and that as soon as he had performed this duty to the Gods, he would return to his wife, whom he intreated to receive beforehand the fruits of his conquests. Such is the recital of Lychas, in which there is very little truth, as we shall see hereafter.

Dejanira, notwithstanding the joy which such unexpected good fortune gives her, yet feels a secret fear, which she is not able to account for, and which fills her with uneasiness at the sight of the captives, whom destiny has thrown into her power, far from their country, laid waste by the rage of war. " Oh Jupiter ! cries she : " avert this melancholy omen, and grant that my children may " never experience the calamity of these unhappy captives." One among them seems particularly to merit her compassion : her youth, her beauty, and her modest sorrow, touch the heart of the queen : she interests herself in the fate of this lovely captive, and repeatedly inquires her name and family ; but the fair prisoner keeps an obstinate silence. Cassandra behaves in the same manner to Clytemnestra, in the Agamemnon of Eschylus. If we would understand the ancients perfectly, we must compare them with each other. This will give us a key to their manners, and the spirit of the age in which they lived. Lychas being desired by Dejanira to tell her who this young captive is, pretends not to know ; so that

Dejanira directs some of her attendants to conduct her and her train into the palace, there to take some repose.

The queen, after dismissing Lychas, prepares to retire also, when a man enters and intreats her to stop a moment, and listen to a secret he has to unfold, which is of the utmost consequence to her. Upon this, every one withdraws, except the Chorus, whom this person allows to stay and partake the secret. "Know, princess," says he to Dejanira, that Lychas either deceives you, or had deceived us before. I heard him say, in the presence of a great number of witnesses, that Hercules entered into this expedition against Eurytus, on account only of this young beauty. Yes; it was love, and not his pretended slavery to Omphale, and the feigned death of Iphitus, that forced him upon this war; love, oh Dejanira! produced his valour and these triumphs. Hercules, despairing to obtain this princess, and her father Eurytus, made use of a slight pretence to invade his dominions. He revenged himself on the king, for refusing him his daughter, by his death, and by the destruction of his kingdom. Thou seest he sent his prisoner before him; this was not done undesignedly: do not imagine that he will treat her like a captive: love, which tyrannizes ever his heart, will never suffer him to do that. This is what I learnt from Lychas, as well as many other citizens: it is indeed melancholy news for thee, but too probable; and I thought myself obliged to let thee know it."

The queen, struck as with a thunderbolt, cries out, "Oh wretched that I am! what shall I do? what a serpent have I received in my bosom!" Enraged at the perfidy of Lychas, she asks the advice of the Chorus upon this occasion. The Chorus are of opinion that she ought to press Lychas to declare the truth. As she is going after him, he comes of himself to meet her; and, being immediately to return to Hercules, "Princess, says he, what am I to say to thy husband in thy name?"

The queen takes advantage of this opportunity to sound this courier with all the subtlety of a woman, and all the dignity of a great princess: she manages her enquiries very artfully; and at first seems only to wish he would repeat all he has already told her concerning her illustrious husband. The subject was interesting enough to make it appear natural that she should desire this; but all on a sudden she turns the discourse upon the fair captive, and again asks who she is? Lychas answers, as before, that he is ignorant

rant of her name and quality. Dejanira begins to intimidate him.
“ To whom, says she, dost thou think thou art speaking ?”

LYCHAS. Alas ! what means this question, princess ?

DEJANIRA. Answer me.

LYCHAS. It is to Dejanira, to my sovereign, that I speak.

DEJANIRA. 'Tis well, thou acknowledgest then that I am thy sovereign.

LYCHAS. Most certainly.

DEJANIRA. What punishment thinkest thou ought to be inflicted on a treacherous slave ?

LYCHAS. Treacherous ! what snare art thou laying for me, princess ?

DEJANIRA. Wretch ! it is thou who hast dared to lay snares for me.

LYCHAS. Permit me, oh queen ! to retire, while I am yet able to comprehend a little of thy discourse ?

DEJANIRA. No, I will detain thee, till thou hast answered me.

LYCHAS. As to what ?

DEJANIRA. This captive whom thou hast brought with thee, dost thou know her or not ?

LYCHAS. I have already said all I know of her.

Dejanira names Iole to him, and insinuates that she has had information concerning her from other persons. Lychas denies all ; and evades her questions in the manner we have seen. The queen repeats to him what he had said himself to the citizens, and presses him to declare the truth, but in vain : the officer persists in his first assertion ; and demands permission to return to his king ; but Dejanira has recourse to an artifice * which could hardly fail of succeeding. She pretends that she is wholly indifferent about her husband's little infidelities : she values herself upon her knowledge of the disposition of men, and upon having got above the little weaknesses and jealousy of her sex. “ She declares that she has suppressed a useless delicacy, and knows what indulgence is due from a wife to a husband. Hercules, she says, has long accustomed her to be easy on this article ; and besides, the compassion she feels for Iole is a proof that she is not capable of suf-

* Racine has given his Roxana all the jealousy and all the art of Dejanira ; but he has made her much more criminal : yet I do not think the Greek poet wholly ju-

stifiable in his management of this character, any more than the French ; although Dejanira is far less to be condemned than Roxana.

“ fer-

" fering much inquietude on account of a rival." By this pernicious cunning, and affected disinterestedness, Dejanira frees Lychas from his apprehensions; and afterwards, by shewing him how greatly falsehood is disliked, particularly by persons in power, who are in a condition to detect and punish it, she determines him to confess all. This he does; and tells her, that it was not in consequence of a command from Hercules, that he concealed his passion for Iole, since Hercules himself made no secret of it; but through his concern for the queen, whom he was unwilling to afflict. " For, con-
tinues he, this hero, to whose courage and valour, nothing was " insurmountable, is vanquished by love." This passage is thus rendered by Ovid:

" * Quem nunquam Juno seriesque immensa laborum
" Fregerit, huic Iolen impossuisse jugum."

The queen has now heard enough; but still dissembling her jealous rage, she promises to treat her prisoners kindly, and orders Lychas to enter the palace, and wait till she gives him the present she designs for her husband, in return for that he has sent her: this said, she retires likewise.

The virgins who compose the Chorus conclude the act, by reflections on the power of love: from enumerating the Deities who have been enslaved by this passion, they pass to mortals, and describe the combat between Hercules and the river Achelous, for Dejanira. This description is beautiful, and naturally connected with the subject.

A C T III.

While Lychas, who is now ready to depart, converses with the Chorus, Dejanira comes out of the palace, to impart to these faithful friends the torments that fill her bosom. Lychas goes out.
" Ah! cries Dejanira, like a deceived pilot, who receives into his " vessel a burthen likely to sink it, I have opened my arms to a " rival. Alas! a thousand charms smile in her eyes, and banish " mine." This thought it is that racks her; yet she loves Hercules, unfaithful and inconstant as he is: and to fix his heart, she has recourse to an expedient which she believes infallible. To understand this, it is necessary to recollect the adventure of the Centaur Nessus. Hercules, when he conducted Dejanira to Trachine, was

* Ovid's Epistles, 9.

obliged to pass a river, and confided her to the care of Nessus, who employed himself in ferrying over travellers; but the Centaur offering violence to this princess, the son of Alcmena slew him with his arrows which had been dipped in the poisonous blood of the Hydra of Lerna, which he had formerly killed. The dying Centaur told Dejanira, that if she would for the future be wholly free from all apprehensions of a rival in the affections of Hercules, she must preserve some of his blood, which would prove a philtre always capable of recalling him to her. The inquisitive and jealous Dejanira carried away with her some of this blood, with an intention to make use of it when necessary, as Sophocles and Ovid relate. She therefore now tells the Chorus, that having fortunately remembered this philtre, she had dipped a robe in it, which she intended to send to Hercules. However a scruple rises in her mind upon what might be the effect of this dangerous trial, which she had never yet made. The Chorus wisely endeavour to heighten these fears, which spring from a secret presage; but passion prevents Dejanira from farther reflection, especially upon seeing Lychas, who comes to receive her last orders. She then stifles her fears, makes the first advance, and requires secrecy of the Chorus, with regard to this new species of magic.

This scruple suppressed in its birth, is finely managed by Sophocles, as we shall soon see. The queen gives Lychas the robe designed for Hercules, with orders to prevail upon him to wear it as soon as possible, that he may appear with the more decency at the sacrifices. Lychas takes the box, which is sealed with the queen's seal, promises to acquit himself faithfully of his duty, and goes away. Ovid has thus elegantly expressed the innocence of Dejanira and Lychas.

“ Ignaroque Lichæ quid tradat neficia luctus
“ Ipsa suos tradit.”

Meantime the Chorus offer up a prayer for Hercules, and conceive favourable hopes from his return.

A C T IV.

Dejanira, as has been observed, is in that state when the malignity of the human heart struggling with its natural rectitude, is divided between the desire of gratifying itself, and the fear of committing a crime: a state in which it is usual for passion to prevail over duty. For, in this doubt, when the heart enters into a treaty,

treaty, it is more than half overcome; and we find that Dejanira follows her inclination, without giving herself time to examine whether she does well or ill. Even the very manner of her consulting the Chorus concerning her doubts, is but an artifice of her passion, which seeks for support rather than advice; and remorse is the consequence of it. Her reason returning after the departure of Lychas, she imparts to her confidants her fears, and seeks if possible to be delivered from them; for Sophocles has painted her virtuous, though jealous. And indeed, hers is not the jealousy of a Medea, who would murder her rival and her husband: all she desires is to recover his heart, and render him indifferent towards Iole.

She reflects upon the magical operation she has performed, and the wonders that attended it. Nessus had desired her to keep his blood in a dark place, and when she made use of it, to do it secretly, and in the dark; but he particularly charged her not to expose to the light, before it was worn, the robe dipped in this blood. She had followed these directions exactly; but the lock of wool which she used instead of a sponge to spread the philtre upon the robe rotted as soon as it was exposed to the air. This surprising circumstance terrifies Dejanira; and she begins but too late to suspect the Centaur's present. "For what reason could induce "a lover, murdered on her account, to be desirous of serving "her? doubtless it was to revenge himself upon his enemy, that "he deceived her with an invidious present." The queen now remembers, that the arrows with which the Centaur was wounded, had been poisoned with the blood of the Hydra. She therefore doubts no more but that Hercules is the victim of this pretended philtre; and she determines, if this fatal accident should happen, to put an end to her life, and conceal her shame in the tomb.

This repentance in a heart virtuous, but drawn aside, is according to nature; and I do not think it possible to be more happily expressed, than Sophocles has done it. The Chorus endeavour in vain to remove these apprehensions, and to prevail upon the queen to hope better from a stratagem which she was persuaded was wholly innocent. Dejanira feels her fears and her disquiets increase, and her son Hyllus, who returns unexpectedly, confirms them, by the words he utters upon his entrance, "Ah mother! " says he: mayst thou either be no longer my mother, or cease to "live: or rather be, if possible, less guilty. Thou hast this day "murdered my father, and thy husband."

De-

Dejanira, struck with terror and amazement, asks him several questions; and each answer she receives is a new stab to her heart. Hyllus is come from his father, and was a witness of the miserable condition to which the fatal robe had reduced him. This hero was at Cenee, where he was building a temple in honour of Jupiter, and tracing out the plan of a sacred wood: there it was that his son Hyllus found him, and whither Lychas came with the present from Dejanira. Here there is a fault which it is not easy to defend: Plautus in his Captives is guilty of the same. The distance from Cenee to Trachine is too great to make it credible that any one could travel thither and back again in so short a time as Sophocles allows for the journey of Hyllus and Lychas. How could Hyllus, in the space of a few hours, go to Cenee to his father, see him busied in his designs of erecting a temple, assist at a sacrifice at which Lychas also who had come back from Trachine, was present; in a word, be witness to all that had passed, and attend his father to Trachine during the time taken up in two acts? But Sophocles, who was originally so scrupulous, with respect to probability, undoubtedly took advantage of the distance of those places from Athens, where the majority of the spectators did not very closely examine the matter, and willingly admitted the appearance of probability, where geography appeared to be but little violated. The same thing is done now by our audiences, though more knowing with respect to tragedies, where the nicities of place are still less observed.

But to return to the recital made by Hyllus. "Alcides, through
 "respect to the request of his wife, put on the robe she had sent
 "him. Thus adorned, he appeared at a pompous sacrifice; but
 "scarce had the pile whereon the victims were placed begun to
 "blaze, when the venom with which the robe was poisoned pro-
 "duced its fatal effect. The whole body of Hercules was cover-
 "ed with a profuse sweat: the dreadful robe stuck fast to his
 "back, and could not be torn off without bringing the flesh with
 "it. The poison glided into his veins, and insinuated itself into
 "the marrow of his bones. Hercules called Lychas, and asked from
 "what hand he received this horrible present? and upon his an-
 "swering, from Dejanira's: the hero, transported with rage, and
 "with the excess of his tortures, seized the wretched Lychas, and
 "threw him with such force upon a rock, that his body was dash-
 "ed in pieces." (It was to render this credible, that Sophocles
 mentioned the circumstance of the death of Iphitus.) "The
 peo-

"people were struck with terror, and not one durst venture to approach the raging Hercules. He threw himself on the earth, he rolled about; then suddenly raising himself, he uttered dreadful cries, which made all the neighbouring shores resound. At length, adds Hyllus, Hercules casting around his looks, which were rendered frightful by the violence of his pain, perceived me in the crowd, drowned in tears. He called me: approach, my son, said he, do not fly a wretched father; come near, although thou shouldest expire with me, come near, my son, and if thou hast any remaining tenderness for a father who has ever loved thee, convey me as soon as possible, out of this foreign country, that I may breathe my last in a place where no human eye may behold me. We instantly obeyed him: he was carried on board a vessel, and with great difficulty we have landed him on this shore: you will see him either alive or dead. (It is to the Chorus that Hyllus addresses this discourse; then turning to the queen, his mother,) "Such is the effect of thy impious projects: why am I not permitted to curse thee? This is the least vengeance that a son can take upon a mother who has murdered his father, and the greatest of heroes."

Dejanira retires without being able to utter a single word; the Chorus endeavour to detain her. "Why, oh princess! dost thou go away thus, without answering? dost thou not know that silence is a tacit confession of guilt?" "Detain her not, resumes Hyllus: oh! may she fly far from these eyes, whose looks have confounded her: is it fit that she should bear the title of mother? she who has so basely forfeited the character; let her fly then; let her inflict joy her crime, and may the fate she prepared for my father, fall solely on her own head."

The silence of Dejanira is conceived in the same spirit with that of Eurydice, in the Antigone; and we shall soon see that it is more judicially managed than this affected line of Ovid's, so often repeated in one epistle.

"*Impia, quid cessas Dejanira mori?*"

When we are resolved to die, we do not exhort ourselves to hasten the stroke, much less with so great an appearance of art; silence is more elegant and more affecting.

The Chorus afterwards, from what they have heard from Hyllus, who likewise retires, recal to remembrance an ancient oracle, which foretold that Hercules, after twelve labours, should enjoy an ever-

everlasting repose: this oracle is now accomplished. The Chorus then reflect upon the misfortunes of Dejanira; they deplore the fatal effects of her credulous jealousy, and at length attribute all these woes to Venus.

A C T V.

Immediately these terrified virgins hear a great noise in the palace, which presages some fatal accident: Dejanira's confidant enters all in tears, and declares that her mistress is dead. " Scarce had she entered the palace, said she, when, at the sight of her son Hyllus, who was going to meet his father, she turned a side to avoid him; and falling prostrate before an altar, there deplored her widowhood. When she saw any thing that belonged to Hercules, hereyes were filled with tears. She wandered wildly through the palace; if she met any of her attendants, she shed torrents of tears, and imputed to the Gods the overthrow of her family: when these first transports were a little subsided, I saw her suddenly enter the apartment of her husband, and keeping myself out of sight, silently observed her actions: she adorned the bed of Hercules, bathed it with her tears, and sitting down upon it, Oh nuptial couch, said she! this is the last time thou wilt receive me. At these words she opened her bosom: I flew to call her son; but when I returned, she had stabbed herself with a poinard. Hyllus, softened at this sight, with tears deplored a mother whom his reproaches had driven to this excess of despair; for he had learnt but too late, that the Centaur had deceived her. The unfortunate Hyllus, racked with grief and remorse, approached his dying mother; he embraced her; he bathed her with his tears, exclaiming against himself for having believed her guilty; and against the peculiar unhappiness of his fate, who was deprived of both parents in one day: such is the sad destiny of this wretched house. After this let us depend upon the good fortune of one single day: too greedy of the next, we never reflect that the present hour is perhaps the last we shall enjoy."

The death of Alcestis*, in Euripides, resembles this of Dejanira; and Virgil has evidently imitated these passages of the Greek poets, when he shews his Dido expiring.

* Euripides Alcestis, part first. V. III.

"Incu-

* "Incubuitque Thoro, dixitque novissima verba."

The daughters of Trachine, overwhelmed with grief for these two fatal accidents, knew not where to begin their lamentations; they would be transported into another country; they dread the presence of the raving Hercules, who is brought upon the stage, surrounded with a numerous court in the utmost affliction for his disaster.

The whole assembly are kept in suspense by the soft sleep he seems to enjoy: his son Hyllus supposing him dead, breaks into lamentable cries; but an old man informs him that excess of pain has thrown him into a slumber, and that it will be dangerous to awake him. A moment after he opens his eyes, and cries out, "Oh Jupiter! into what region am I arrived? into whose hands am I fallen? ah I am torn in pieces! my agonizing pains return!" The nafter some interruptions, "Oh thou promontory of Cenæum, "where I have erected so many altars! oh Gods, by me so much revered! is this the reward you reserved for my piety?"

He afterwards gives the most lively and natural marks of insupportable pain. The scene of Hippolitus in Euripides is in the same taste. Hercules complains that, by their endeavouring to ease his pains, they increased their force; he cannot bear any one to touch him; his tortures become more violent. "Where are ye, he cries, ye robbers, of whom I have purged the forests and the shores of the sea? death is my reward for it; and for an increase to my misery, I see no person near me who will cut the thread of my wretched days; no one who with steel and flames will break the bonds of an intolerable life." The old man, the Chorus, and Hyllus, lament their incapacity to relieve him; but Hercules, seized with a new fit of anguish, conjures his son to plunge a poniard in his breast; it is the only kindness he can expect from him: he implores, he begs for death, but in vain. At length he breaks into that beautiful speech quoted in the Tuscan discourses:

"Oh Dejanira! must I fall thy victim? the implacable hate of Juno, the barbarous tyranny of Eurestheus, have been less fatal to me than the daughter of Oeneus. It is she who has entangled me in this fatal robe, as in a net wrought by the hands of the Furies. Oh dreadful veil! horrible prison! my flesh is fastened to it, the venom penetrates into my veins, my thick black blood boils and wastes away, my body burning in concealed fires is reduced to a shadow; what neither the Centaurs, the Giants,

"Greece, nor the whole world, which I have delivered from a
 "hundred monsters, could effect, a woman has attempted and
 "performed; and I expire by her hands. Oh my son! do what a
 "name so tender exacts of thee: be not swayed by a false pity for
 "thy impious mother; go drag the fury hither, and be a spectator
 "of her punishment. I will this moment prove whether thy
 "affection for thy mother or for me is strongest: go, I say, obey me
 "instantly, compassionate a father whose sufferings are so exqui-
 "site. Alas, I weep! I who was never heard to sigh, or to com-
 "plain, midst all my sufferings: ah I blush at my own weakness!
 "come near my son, judge of my tortures--see my bowels burst-
 "ing out--look on this body all you who are present, behold how
 "cruelly it is mangled. Oh what new torment! what flames con-
 "sume me! Great Jupiter, plunge me in the shades of Tartarus!
 "strike me with thy thunders! ah my wounds open! what tor-
 "ture, what pangs do I not endure? what is become of this
 "arm's boasted strength? are these the hands that stifled the Ne-
 "mean lion? yes, this is the arm which cut off the renowned
 "heads of the Hydra, which vanquished the Centaurs, and destroyed
 "the wild boar of Erimanthus: this is the arm that had force
 "enough to drag Cerberus from Hell, and cut in pieces the dra-
 "gon which guarded the golden fruit: this arm has signalized it-
 "self by a thousand glorious exploits, and never found an enemy
 "able to oppose it. Look on it now, alas! see to what a misera-
 "ble state it is reduced; wasting with a secret poison, it is no lon-
 "ger to be known. The son of Jupiter and Alcmena dies by the
 "hand of a perfidious wife; but I will have vengeance, although I
 "should be annihilated. Let her come then, that from her pu-
 "nishment the world may learn that Hercules, dead as he appears,
 "is still the scourge of the wicked."

This passage must needs have been in the true taste of antiquity, since Ovid has imitated it in his Metamorphoses: he has also improved upon it, by adding this beautiful thought:

"Defessa jubendo est
 "Sava Jovis conjux; ego sum indefessus agendo."

It is to be wished that Ovid, rather than Seneca, had left us the Greek tragedies altered by his hand, as he has done with regard to some that have not come down to us; and which have given us reason to regret the loss of those master-pieces of the tragic genius, the traces of which we see in his Metamorphoses.

Hyllus, undeceived with respect to his mother's guilt, endeavours to undeceive Hercules likewise, which makes a great dramatic incident; for Hercules believes that his son is moved by an unjustifiable compassion for Dejanira, and refuses a long-time to hear him: at length Hyllus acquaints him with the innocence of Dejanira, her jealousy, her death, and the artifice of the Centaur. At the mention of Nessus, the eyes of Hercules are opened; he calls to mind an oracle he had received, and relates it to his son. Jupiter, he said, had predicted to him, that a dead person should deprive him of life; this dead person is the Centaur. He compares this oracle with a later one, which has been already mentioned: namely, that Hercules should from henceforward enjoy continual repose. All these circumstances leave him no longer any room to doubt that his end is near; therefore he intreats his son to promise him obedience in a certain point, which he will not reveal till he has this promise.

The rest of this scene is throughout in the taste of the theatre; for the audience is here kept in a wonderful suspense. The father requires an oath from his son, and when obtained tells him his secret and his last request. It is to carry him to Mount Oeta, to place him on a funeral pile, and set fire to it with his own hands; and this he must perform upon pain of his eternal curses.

The last article fills the youth with horror. "Ah! what is it
"thou commandest me to do?" says he; must I be the murderer of
"my father?" Hercules insists that he shall perform all the other
offices at least; and Hyllus consents, provided this last fatal one
is not required of him. The father however, not satisfied with
this instance of his obedience, exacts another of him, which meets
with equal repugnance. He must marry Iole. How! cries the
son; marry her who has deprived me of both my parents! oh no!
"The wretch who can be guilty of such a crime must be agitated
"by the Furies. Death will be less dreadful to me than this hated
"marriage." Hercules reiterates his command, and threatens him
with his everlasting displeasure if he disobeys. Hyllus resists as
long as was consistent with the duty and submission of a son to a
father; but upon being assured that it is the will of the Gods that he
should marry Iole, he yields, saying, that he cannot possibly offend
the Gods by obeying a father.

Hercules, satisfied with his promise, and being desirous to
avoid another fit of torture, orders his attendants to take him
up and convey him to the pile. He animates himself to suf-

suffer patiently the new pangs this motion gives him, and stifles the cries of nature. "Oh soul, cries he, inured to suffering! oh "heart of iron, suppress thy sighs! dishonour not Hercules!" His weeping son helps to carry him, prepared in spite of himself, to render him the sad office which his father had exacted.

Such is the last scene, but its beauty and spirit cannot be shewn in a bare analysis; and since there is nothing in it repugnant to our manners, I may venture to give it here entire. A judgment may be better made how much is lost by the change of manners; which, not to speak of other difficulties, make it impossible for us to translate completely the works of the ancients: we need only join the scene which we are now going to read to the piece which Cicero has translated, and which Hercules utters in his madness.

The Chorus, greatly affected with the torments he suffers, cry out, "Oh wretched Greece! how wilt thou mourn if thou art "deprived of this hero?"

Hyllus to his father. If thou wilt permit me to answer, I would conjure thee, notwithstanding the sad condition thou art in, to hear what I have to say? This is but justice, calm thy rage a moment, otherwise thou wilt never know what thou oughtest to lament, and what to rejoice at.

Hercules. Speak, but make an end soon; sinking under pain and grief, I cannot penetrate into obscurities.

Hyllus. I have but two words to say to thee concerning my mother and thy wife, her innocence and her fate.

Hercules. Ha! darest thou speak to me of my murdress?

Hyllus. The secret I have to reveal to thee obliges me to break silence: my mother was not guilty.

Hercules. Not guilty!

Hyllus. Thou thyself wilt acknowledge her innocence when thou knowest all.

Hercules. Speak then; but tremble lest by a false tenderness thou shouldst render thyself unworthy of the name of my son.

Hyllus. My mother is dead: a mortal wound----

Hercules. By whose hand was she punished?

Hyllus. Her own hand struck the blow.

Hercules. Perfidious woman! this was to rob me of a just revenge. Why can I not----

Hyllus. Thou wilt not speak thus when thou knowest all.

Hercules. Go on, let me hear the rest of this strange adventure.

HYLLUS. Her crime was an error; her intentions were not wrong.

HERCULES. Her intentions right! and yet she has murdered thy father.

HYLLUS. She believed she was preparing a philtre, and not a poison for thee. She was jealous of Iole, and only sought to recover thy heart.

HERCULES. Is there in Trachine any sorcerer so powerful?

HYLLUS. It was from the Centaur Nessus, that she received this philtre.

HERCULES. From Nessus! then I am lost. Ah, I see it plainly! my death is unavoidable. Go my son, and since thou wilt soon be deprived of a father, go and summon my whole family hither, but particularly the unfortunate Alcmena, whom Jupiter in vain gave me for a mother. Go, it is necessary that I should declare to them the oracles I have received concerning my destiny.

HYLLUS. Alas, Alcmena is not here! she is at Tyrrinth* with some of your children; the rest are at Thebes; I am here alone, but ready to obey thee in all things.

HERCULES. Hear then the oracles, my son, and let thy actions shew from whom thou derivest thy birth. Jupiter my father foretold me that no man living should put a period to my days, but that I should fall by an inhabitant of the shades: my fate is fulfilled; it is the dead Centaur who has destroyed me. Let us compare this oracle with another I received lately: as I entered the sacred forest of Dodona, a prophetic oak assigned me this day of my return, as the beginning of a lasting repose. By this prediction, I understood that a happy life was decreed me, but death was the latent meaning; death, which is the end of all our calamities. Enter then, oh my son, into my designs! delay not till my frenzy returns; fulfil the holiest of all laws, obey thy father.

HYLLUS. Oh heavens! to what tends this discourse? but it is not for me to examine thy designs; declare thy commands, behold me ready to obey thee.

HERCULES. Give me thy hand as a pledge of thy faith.

HYLLUS. Alas my father! why this anxiety, canst thou doubt of my obedience?

* Tyrrinth, a neighbouring City of Argos, so called from the river Tyrrinth. It was the native country of Hercules, and was surnamed Theban, because Amphiaraus was of Thebes.

HERCULES. Come near I say, and then let thy obedience be shewn.

HYLLUS. Since thou wilt have it so, here is my hand.

HERCULES. Swear by Jupiter my father.

HYLLUS. Ah! what am I to swear? what is it I must do?

HERCULES. That which I shall tell thee afterwards.

HYLLUS. I will do it: I call to witness Jupiter, the guardian of oaths.

HERCULES. Bind thyself by some dreadful punishments, if thou failest in obedience.

HYLLUS. Alas! how is it possible that I should disobey thee? but since thou wilt have it so, I here bind myself to perform thy will upon pain of the severest punishments.

HERCULES. Thou knowest the summit of mount Oeta, consecrated to thy ancestor Jupiter.

HYLLUS. I know it well; have I not offered many sacrifices there?

HERCULES. There is to be offered another now: thou, with the assistance of thy friends, must carry me to the top of this mountain; when there, erect a funeral pile of oaks and wild olives, place me upon it, and set fire to it with thy own hand. No tears I charge thee, no groans, not even a sigh; it is by this noble fortitude that I shall know thee for my son. If thou refusest to perform this office, thy father, tho' in the shades, will pursue thee with unfated vengeance.

HYLLUS. Oh my father! what hast thou said? what commands are these?

HERCULES. Thou must execute them: if thy heart ballances, I renounce thee for my son.

HYLLUS. Alas! alas! what hast thou ordered me? must I be a parricide to merit the title of thy son?

HERCULES. A parricide! no, but my deliverer.

HYLLUS. Thy deliverer! what by casting thee in the midst of flames!

HERCULES. If to perform this last sad office fills thee with so much horror, I will dispense with that; but at least do the rest.

HYLLUS. I will: this arm shall help to bear thee to mount Oeta.

HERCULES. And wilt thou build the pile?

HYLLUS. I will do this; for nothing shall appear hard for me, provided I am not your murderer.

HER-

HERCULES. Thou must, my Hyllus, crown all these services by one slight instance more of duty.

HYLLUS. What would I not do for my father?

HERCULES. Hear then what I farther require of thee: the daughter of Eurytus---

HYLLUS. Iole.

HERCULES. Her, if thou hast any regard to the oaths thou hast sworn to a father; if thou hast the tenderness of a son for him, hear me, I command thee; take care that thou dost not disobey me; thou must-----

HYLLUS. What?

HERCULES. Thou must marry Iole*: thou only art worthy of her whom Hercules has loved. Answer not, but resolve to obey me; thy submission to my first request requires that thou shouldest make this effort.

HYLLUS. Oh heavens! but thy condition obliges me to restrain my just complaints. Ah! what heart could without horror receive a proposal such as this?

HERCULES. Thou wilt not obey me then?

* The reverend father Poree has shewn me, that Racine concurs with Sophocles, or has expressly imitated him in his Mithridates; for this Prince when he is dying, gives Monimia to Xiphares, as Hercules gives Iole to Hyllus.

Mais vous me tenez lieu d'empire, de couronne,
Vous seule me restez. Souffrez que je vous donne,
Madame, & tous ces vœux que j'exigeois de vous,
Mon cœur pour Xipharès vous les demande tous.

Mithr. Sc. the last.

Yet it is certain, that the situation was very different: Xipharus was in love with Monimia, and the rival of his father. Whereas, Hyllus consented with reluctance to wed Iole. But Racine has, as it is said, fitted his

piece to the theatre, and his tragedy to the French taste. However Iole is the cause of the death of Alcides; and Monimia of that of Mithridates. Monimia says herself:

Hélas, & plutôt aux Dieux qu'à son fort inhumain.
Moi-même j'eusse pu ne point prêter la main,
Et que simple témoin du malheur qui l'accable
Je le pusse pleurer sans en être coupable.

The more we examine these two tragedies, the more probable it seems that Mithridates was founded on the Trachinianees. And if this work should be so well received as to encourage me to continue it, I shall enter farther into Racine's imitations, and

shew how he has formed himself upon the ancient tragic poets; even in those pieces where he is least suspected of imitation. This comparison must needs be equally advantageous to Racine, and to the ancient theatre..

HYL-

H E R C U L E S
ON
M O U N T O E T A.
A
T R A G E D Y O F S E N E C A.

ONE of the Senecas, or rather, he who has assumed their name, and who understood the drama no better than they did, in treating of the subject we have just been examining, has not wholly followed the same conduct any more than in all the others which he has handled, after the Greek tragic writers; and still less has he endeavoured to copy their inimitable and noble simplicity.

The persons of Seneca's drama are Hercules, Dejanira, Alcmena, Hyllus, Iole, a Confidant, a Chorus of Oetolian women, another Chorus of Oechaliennes, Philoctetes and Lychas: some of these are only introduced to adorn the scene.

A C T I.

Hercules first appears, but without informing us where or why he appears. However this is not Hercules; it is the captain of the *Visionaries*: it is still worse.

“ Father of the Gods, says the Latin Alcides, thou mayst now
“ reign securely. This arm has given thee peace: there is no
“ longer any need of thy thunders: no barbarous tyrants, no per-
“ fidious kings remain on earth: I have extirpated all who merit
“ thy indignation, and yet heaven is denied me still. My obedi-
“ ence has shewed me what I am, a son worthy of Jupiter. Even
“ Juno, the implacable Juno has acknowledged me for thy son.
“ Why then dost thou delay my just reward? art thou afraid that
“ Atlas who supports the heavens, will sink under the additional
“ weight

" weight of Hercules. Death and hell have not been able to hold
 " me." Here he enters into a detail of his labours; not in the
 manner of the Hercules of Sophocles, but always as an idle
 boaster. He afterwards goes on thus: " I ask thee not, oh my
 " father! to point out to me the road to heaven; I know already
 " how to find it. Art thou afraid that the earth should produce
 " new monsters? let her haste then to bring them forth while yet she
 " enjoys the presence of Hercules." According to him, none will ever
 be able to imitate his actions: the sun could not keep pace with
 his travels; he has got to the end of nature, and can go no farther
 on the earth: he has violated eternal night: he has sustained all
 the rage of the sea; the most dreadful storm could not wreck the
 vessel that had Hercules on board. At length, nothing more re-
 mains for him to do on earth, because she dare not produce a new
 race of monsters. The jest is, that reflecting on the hated Juno
 bears him, he says, that she has transferred the monsters to heaven.
 Can we possibly guess how? why there are in the heavens signs
 and constellations, which men have thought proper to distinguish
 by the names of lion, bear, serpent, &c. He has a thought more
 extravagant still; for he tells us that his labours are placed in hea-
 ven before him, and that he sees all his great exploits written
 there; but that Juno was resolved to render the celestial mansions
 formidable to him, filling them with these monsters. Strange
 puerility! however this is not all. Juno, he says, had better not
 refuse him a place in heaven; for if she continues obstinate, he
 will overthrow all, new form the earth, join Spain to Sicily, pre-
 scribe other bounds to the sea, and open new paths for the rivers.
 " Jupiter, adds he, thou mayst confide the guard of the Gods to me,
 " and rely securely upon Hercules for the care of the whole ce-
 " lestial region when he is there. The frigid, or the torrid
 " zone, it matters not; be assured the Gods shall be in safety
 " from one pole to the other." At length he draws a com-
 parison between himself and other deified mortals; such as Apollo,
 Bacchus, and Perseus. " What have they done after all, says he,
 " to merit divine honours? one of them killed the serpent Python;
 " but how many Pythons were there in the Hydra of Lerna? an-
 " other conquered India; what is that to the whole subjected world?
 " the third cut off the head of Medusa; this was but one mon-
 " ster only destroyed." After this boasting speech, he sends Ly-
 chas to Dejanira, and commands some of his other attendants to
 convey the victims to the temple of Cenæum. Here we begin to per-

ceive that Hercules is not yet at Trachine, which is confirmed by what follows. The action is then performed in more places than one; for Dejanira, who appears soon after, is supposed to be at Trachine, as Sophocles represents her.

It is not thus that the judicious Greek poet explains his subject; he does not give us declamations, but lively pictures. He introduces Dejanira complaining of her husband's absence, and full of anxiety for his safety. Then Hyllus appears, who is sent by the afflicted queen to find out his father: afterwards she hears the happy news of Alcides's victory. From this beginning so simple and so natural is produced all those wonderful events which the poet displays in the sequel; for his purpose was what Horace prescribes :

“ Non fumum ex fulgore, sed ex fumo dare lucem cogitat.”

But after hearing Seneca's Hercules, who opens the play, we cannot help saying after Horace,

“ Quid dignum tanto feret hic promissor hiatu?”

Before we proceed any farther, the reader perhaps will not be displeased to see the Latin scene of Hercules softened in French by Rotrou, in his tragedy of Hercules dying. We shall there perceive that it is Seneca, after all who has (if we may dare say so) carried the French drama to that height to which it attained in its finest age.

“ Puissant moteur des Dieux, ferme appui de la terre,
 “ Seul etre souverain, seul maître du tonnerre,
 “ Goûte enfin, roi des cieux, le doux fruit de mes faits,
 “ Qui par tout l'univers one établi la paix.
 “ J'ai d'entre les sujets la trahison bannie.
 “ J'ai des rois arrogans puni la tyrannie,
 “ Et rendu ton renom si puissant & si beau
 “ Que la foudre en tes mains n'est plus qu'un vain fardeau.
 “ Des objets de ton bras, le mien est l'homicide,
 “ Et tu n'as rien à faire après les faits d' Alcide.
 “ Tu n'as plus à tonner: & ciel toute fois.
 “ M'est encore interdit après tous ces exploits.”

These verses, noble as they are, have still somewhat of the spirit of boasting: however the Hercules of Rotrou is less extravagant than Seneca's; and in what follows he has softened him still more:

“ Parois

" Parois-je encore un fils indigne de mon pere ?
 " Junon n'a-telle pas assouvi sa colere ?
 " N'a-telle pas assez par son aversion
 " Fait paroître ma force & mon extraction ?
 " N'ai-je pas sous mes loix asservi les deux poles ?
 " Et celui dont le ciel charge tant les épaules.
 " Et sur qui ce fardeau repose pour jamais,
 " Ne me peut-il porter avec ce rude faix ?
 " Ainsi que mes exploits rends ma gloire parfaite :
 " La Parque t'a remis le foin de ma défaite
 " Et de quelques efforts qu'elle attaque mes jours
 " L'impuissante qu'elle est n'en peut borner le cours.
 " L'air, la terre, la mer, les infernales rives
 " Laissent enfin ma vie & mes forces oisives.
 " Et voyant sans effet leurs monstres abbattus
 " Ces foibles ennemis n'en reproduisent plus.
 " I'ere de la clarté, grand Astre, ame du monde,
 " Quels termes, n'a franchis ma course vagabonde ?
 " Sur quels bords a-t'on vû tes rayons étalés,
 " Où ces bras triomphans ne se soient signalés ?
 " J'ai porté la terreur plus loin que ta carriere,
 " Plus loin qu'où tes rayons ont porté la lumiere.
 " J'ai forcé des païs que le jour ne voit pas.
 " Et j'ai vû la nature au-delà de mes pas.
 " Neptune & les Tritons ont vû d'un œil timide.
 " Promener mes vaisseaux sur leur campagne humide.
 " L'air tremble comme l'onde, au seul bruit de mon nom,
 " Et n'ose plus servir la haine de Junon.
 " Mais qu'en vain j'ai purgé le séjour où nous sommes !
 " Je donne aux immortels la peur que j'ôte aux hommes !
 " Ces monstres, dont ma main a délivré cent lieux
 " Profitent de leur mort, & s'emparent des cieux.
 " Le soleil voit par eux ses maisons occupées :
 " Sans en être chassés, ils les ont usurpées.
 " Ces vaincus qui m'ont fait si célebre aux neveux
 " Ont au ciel devant moi la place que j'y veux.
 " Junon dont le courroux ne peut encor s'éteindre
 " En a peuplé le ciel pour me le faire craindre.
 " Mais qu'il en soit rempli de l'un à l'autre bout,
 " Leurs efforts seront vains ; ce bras forcera tout.

Rotrou, it is plain, has omitted many passages as turgid as those he has taken. If he had designed, for example, to express Hercules's threat of overturning all nature, he might have put into his mouth what the Artabazus*, of the Visionaries says which is in the exact taste of Seneca.

“ Quoi donc, je suis oisif & je serois si lâche,
 “ Que mon bras pût avoir tant soit peu de relâche?
 “ O Dieux! faites sortir d'un antre ténébreux
 “ Quelque horrible géant, ou quelque monstre affreux:
 “ S'il faut que ma valeur manque un jour de matière,
 “ Je vais faire du monde un vaste cimetière.”

This is literally the speech of Hercules.

The second scene in the French tragedy is not conducted with more judgment than the first; but at least that is now discovered which ought have been known before, that Hercules is returning to Trachine, loaden with the spoils of Oechalia, and followed by a great number of captives; among whom is Iole, the daughter of the conquered king.

Iole and the rest of the captives complain of their destiny, but in too unaffected a manner to force tears from the audience: they weep in sentences and antitheses; yet some of these are beautiful, as the following for example:

“ Nunquam est ille miser cui facile est mori.
 “ Felices sequeris, mors, miseros fugis!”

“ They ought not to be called unfortunate who are at liberty
 “ to die. Oh death! the happy only find thee, thou fleest the
 “ miserable.”

The triumph of Alcides is heightened by the miseries he has occasioned. They paint him as impenetrable to iron, and harder than steel. Weapons are blunted upon his body; and what weapons? they give a minute description of those used by the Scythians, the Sarmatians, and the Parthians. His single weight has overthrown Oechalia.

“ Muros Oechaliæ corpore propalit.”

“ What he resolves to subdue is already subdued. His designs are
 “ so many exploits.”

* A person in the Visionaries.

"Vincere quod paras.

"Jam viatum est."

"His glance alone is more fatal than death."

"Pro fato potuit vultus iniquior."

At length the captives confess that they have one great advantage in their misfortune, which is, that it is extreme. They have nothing worse to fear; they have seen Hercules in his wrath.

"Commoda cladibus

"Magnis magna patent. Nil supereft mali;

"Iratum miseræ vidimus Herculem."

In conclusion:

* "Mais comme il n'est peine d'ame si forte

"Qu'il ne s'en faille à la fin consoler;

The Chorus comfort Iole; and for this purpose employ an argument drawn from the very excess of their misfortunes, which cannot admit of increase. After this, they all go to present themselves to Dejanira.

A C T II.

An old woman, the confidant of Dejanira, comes to declare the affliction of this princess at the sight of her rival Iole: but who has told Dejanira that Iole is her rival? Nothing has yet been said that shews she was informed of her misfortune. Sophocles manages this incident with more art: he unfolds the mystery by degrees. The curiosity of Dejanira begins, and the imprudent zeal of a courtier completes the melancholy discovery. Seneca supposes all this already done; but he ought to have given us notice of it at least. Let us see however, how the confidant prepares the mind of the audience for the sight of an injured and enraged wife? It is by expressions almost as extravagant as those in the scene of Hercules. She compares Dejanira to a tygref; and in this there is no exaggeration, for the description she gives of her goes farther. "Her grief and rage burst from her heart to her eyes; wildly she wanders through the palace: the spacious dome is too confined for her furious steps."

Rotrou, who has translated this piece exactly, renders the thoughts in this scene literally.

" Elle court sans dessein, & sa course rapide
 " Cent fois a fait trembler tout le palais d'Alcide.
 " Elle renverse tout, rompt tout, & sous ses pas
 " La maison est étroite, & ne lui suffit pas.
 " Sa pâleur fait juger du mal qui la possède ;
 " La rougeur tôt après à la pâleur succède :
 " Elle verse des pleurs, & dans le même instant
 " Du feu sort de ses yeux qui les séche en sortant."

What thoughts are here! however we shall have others more extravagant still. Dejanira appears, but she is no longer that princess, virtuous tho' jealous, and such as Sophocles represents her: she is a Fury who would make her vengeance equal to the labours of Hercules, and her persecutions greater even than Juno's.* In the Greek poet, she seeks only to recover the heart of her husband: here her first thought is a cruel revenge. Let Seneca give her another kind of jealousy than Sophocles: let it be a jealousy wrought up to madness; we may be content to pass that fault which changes the face of the whole piece: we know how far the rage of a furious woman can go.

* " Notumque furens quid famina possit."

But that Dejanira should express herself like a demoniac is intolerable. Who can understand her when she would have her bosom produce more monsters than Alcides has destroyed: when she says that all these monsters are actually in her heart; and when she stops to give free course to these shining thoughts which are more the language of wit than the heart. Yet there are beauties in this scene; as these for example:

The CONFIDANT. Thou wouldest die.

DEJANIRA. I will die, but die the wife of Hercules, ere he has dishonoured himself by an unworthy passion---or let him perish; or let him sacrifice me: let him add his wife to the monsters he has destroyed: let him number my defeat among his triumphs: at least, I will expire upon the bed of Alcides.

Also when the confidant, to comfort her, tells her, that in Iole Hercules loved only a different conquest; and that his passion was at an end as soon as he had subdued Eurytus her father. " No answers Dejanira, he is enamoured even of the miseries of Iole." At length the queen determined to die after sacrificing her husband and her rival to her just revenge, speaks this beautiful line:

" Felix jacet quicunque quos odit premit."

* Virgil B. 5. V. 6.

“Felix jacet quicunque quos odit premit”

Which Rotrou, the faithful translator of Seneca, renders thus:

“Et qui tuë en mourant doit mourir satisfait.”

There are many other thoughts of the same kind, but these are commonly spoiled by the other verses, in which they may be said to be drowned, and appear like true diamonds among a great number of false stones. How cold Dejanira's anger seems amidst so much fire! for in effect, all this violence of resentment, which threatens nothing but flames and daggers, ends in calling in the assistance of magic to compose a philtre. She orders her confidant to tinge with the blood of Nessus a robe, which she designs to send to her unfaithful husband: mean time, she implores the Deity of love to favour her projects. The operation is performed in an instant; and Lychas, who enters very seasonably without being sent for, and without uttering a word, is dispatched to Hercules with the robe.

The Chorus, which is not the same with that in the first act, but composed of Eolian virgins in the interest of Dejanira, form the interlude upon these words of the queen, “Lament my misfortunes.” They prepare to obey her; but their ode, instead of being plaintive, is nothing but a lecture of learned and fine morality upon the text, “The afflicted seldom find faithful friends.” The comment is very long, and turns upon the miseries of princes contrasted with the felicity of private persons. This likewise is foreign to the subject; but we could pardon it, if we found a few of those beautiful strokes which Virgil has given us upon the same subject.

“O fortunatos nimium; sua si bona norint,
“Agricolas!”

“Happy they who possess the blessings of a country life, if
“they were conscious of their good fortune.”

A C T III.

Dejanira enters to grieve mechanically, if I may be permitted to use this term, to express what is really the case. She acquaints the audience with the cause of her grief; the magical operation was scarce performed, and the robe sent to Hercules, when the remainder of the blood with which the robe had been tinged, being exposed to the air, melted and took fire. Seneca, to describe this circumstance, has recourse to geography, and seeks for mountains

where the snows dissolve, and maritime coasts where the dashing waves are changed into foam: "While I was wondering at this prodigy, continues Dejanira, the cause of my astonishment vanished; the earth heaved like the waves of the sea, and every thing that the venom touched was shaken." This is not Sophocles, or rather it is the Greek poet sophisticated in Latin. See the same thought drest out in the manner of Rotrou.

" Une obscure fumée au milieu de la porte
 " M'a fait baisser la vûë, & j'ai vû sur le seuil,
 " (O prodige, ô spectacle, épouvantable à l'œil)
 " Sous deux gouttes de sang par hazard repanduës
 " Du bois se consumer, & des pierres fonduës;
 " L'air en étoit obscur, la terre en écumoit;
 " Le fer en étoit chaud, & le bois en fumoit."

If the translation is trifling, it is because the French poet was desirous of copying his original exactly.

Hyllus returns all on a sudden from the mountain of Cenæum, where he had seen Hercules clad in the fatal robe, offering a sacrifice to Jupiter. He begins thus: "Fly mother, seek an asylum beyond the boundaries of the ocean, the stars, and hell: fly if it be possible where the labours of Alcides have never been heard of: fly to the temples of Juno, they only will be open to thee." Juno, it must be observed, was the implacable enemy of Hercules: but one would imagine, that Hyllus had studied a long time for this singular manner of expressing his rage. Rotrou makes him speak more sensibly in the following lines.

" Alez, courez, fuyez, hé quoi, madame ? ô Dieux !
 " Après cet accident vous êtes dans ces lieux !
 " Helas, si quelque route en ce danger extrême
 " Va plus loin que la terre, & que l'Erebe même,
 " Et dont Hercule encor n'ait aucun souvenir,
 " Courez ; c'est le chemin que vois devez tenir."

He afterwards tells her, that the infected blood of Nessus had murdered his father: but who has informed him of the magical operation? This news throws Dejanira into despair. Hyllus gives a circumstantial account of all that had happened; but this is done with so little judgment and propriety, that a slight sketch will be sufficient to give the reader an idea of it.

" Her-

" Hercules was in the midst of his prayers to Jupiter, when
 " suddenly a groan escaped him: the groan of Hercules resounded
 " like a dreadful cry; like the roaring of a wounded bull; like
 " those peals of thunder which threaten the whole universe with
 " destruction. This groan rebounded to the stars and the ocean;
 " even the Cyclades and the most distant coasts reechoed it. Her-
 " cules is now seen to weep. We suppose him seized with new
 " pangs: all tremble, all fly; but the hero casting around his eyes
 " enflamed with rage and pain, sought Lychas only. The un-
 " happy wretch embraced the altar, terror seized him, and left him
 " scarce life enough to suffer. Alcides seized his hand: this is
 " the hand, said he, which will be said has subdued me. Her-
 " cules died by Lychas, and oh, what increase of infamy! Lychas
 " will receive his death from Hercules. I shall pollute my
 " noble destiny, and the death of this unhappy wretch shall be
 " the last of my labours. That instant Lychas was hurled into
 " the air, and sprinkled the clouds with his blood. Such a shot
 " let fly by one of the Getæ, or by a Cydonian*, arises in the air
 " but not so high, &c."

The rest is of the same turn: it is made up of some very fine verses, mixed with the false sublime. Rotrou, faithful as he is to Seneca, has not ventured to translate the greatest part of these thoughts.

After this recital, the same jingle of antithesis makes the answer of Dejanira. Reading it seriously and coolly, one would be tempted to think that she had not common sense; so much she endeavours after conceits, which turn always upon a needle's point; for there is this in the tragic enthusiasm of that age, it goes always on with the same sense like those pieces of bad music which quiver continually on the same note. Dejanira's long speech signifies nothing more but that she is miserable, and resolved to die. In Sophocles, she retires without uttering a single word. This is the stroke of a master, the beauty of which, a genius corrupted by false taste, was not capable of feeling; a judicious reader cannot be pleased with the false sublime which is here substituted in the place of that eloquent silence.

This tedious speech is followed, as usual, by quick questions and replies, between the queen and her confidant. It is not the manner which I blame here; for that is good, and proper for the drama: when it is natural, nothing is more lively, or more capa-

* Cydon, a town in Crete.

ble of increasing the impression already made on the minds of the spectators; but it is also true that nothing is more disagreeable when in such dialogues nature is entirely laid aside, and the poet's art every where appears without any other fire than that of a mere disclaimer, which after all, is but a borrowed fire. The most ingenious sentiments are then cold and unaffected; one example of this shall suffice.

The confidant blames Dejanira for not justifying herself to Hylus, since it was not her intention that the philtre should have that fatal effect; her crime was a mistake only. In Sophocles, we will grant it is so, but not in Seneca. Let us suppose however, that the wife of Hercules is innocent, as the Latin poet condescends to suppose her after what she did in the second act: in that case the following conversation between the queen and her confidant is less exceptionable than any other.

"*NUTRIX.* Nocens videri qui cupid, mortem cupid.

"*DEJAN.* Mors innocentes sola deceptos facit.

"*NUTRIX.* Titana fugies? Dejan. Ipse me titan fugit.

"*NUTRIX.* Vitam relinquens misera? Dejan. At Alciden sequar.

"*NUTRIX.* Supereft, & aures ille cælestes trahit.

"*DEJAN.* Vinci Hercules cum potuit, hinc capet mori, &c."

CONFIDANT. To wish for death is to be willing to appear guilty.

DEJANIRA. The faults of inadvertency can be expiated only by death.

CONFIDANT. Wouldst thou fly the light of day?

DEJANIRA. I would; because the light detests and flies from me.

CONFIDANT. Wouldst thou quit life?

DEJANIRA. Yes, to follow Alcides.

CONFIDANT. Alcides is not yet dead.

DEJANIRA. But he is subdued, and to him this is the first approach of death.

Perhaps we might pardon this thought, if it stood alone; but it is carried too far, and surrounded with the false lustre of others which debase it. The confidant, in the extravagance of her tenderness for her mistress, endeavours to persuade her, that the blood of Nessus infected with that of the Hydra will not be mortal to Hercules; because that hero had killed both the Hydra and the Centaur, without suffering from their poisons. These arguments having no effect, she has recourse to tears and prayers; but Dejanira

nira has already taken her resolution: she will be justified only in the shades. She demands with loud cries, the tortures inflicted on Sisiphus, Ixion, Tantalus, and the Danaides: she enumerates those barbarous wives who have betrayed their husbands, to prevail upon the Gods to associate her in their punishment; and to shut the gates of Elysium for ever upon her. A reflection on her innocence consoles her for a moment. "Oh great Alcides, says "she, my heart was innocent, my hand only is guilty."

"*Invicte conjux, innocens animus mihi.*

"*Scelestæ manus est.*"

And now she is willing to defer her death, and expect it from the hand of Hercules, if this will satisfy his vengeance: she wishes that he may dash her wretched body against a rock, as he did that of Lychas; and that he may hurl her into the most distant places, even into a world unknown to her. This is a burlesque thought, which spoils a passage, in which there are some beauties. Rotrou has imitated part of this absurd stuff, and has omitted the rest; in which he shewed greater judgment.

"*Que de cette montagne à tant d'autres fatale*

"*Ce corps précipité jusqu'aux enfers dévale !*

"*Que mon sang sur ce mont fasse mille ruisseaux,*

"*Qu'à ces pierres mon corps laisse autant de morceaux,*

"*Qu'en un endroit du roc ma main reste pendue,*

"*Et ma peau déchirée en d'autres étendue !*

"*Une mort est trop douce, il faut la prolonger,*

"*Et mourir d'un seul coul, c'est trop peu le venger.*"

Though these verses, like many others, are of the same cast with the poem of the Pucelle, it is proper to lay them before the readers, to give them a just idea of the several changes of poetry, and of the history of taste, which we deduce in this work.

Hyllus, whom Seneca makes a witness of his mother's despair, is silent hitherto: it was a long time to be so in such a conjuncture; but at length, undeceived with regard to her guilt, he endeavours to persuade her to take no violent resolutions against herself. Dejanira however conjures him to hasten her fate, and even to kill her with his own hands. "What stops thee, my son? says she; "this action will be pious in thee. Thou art irresolute, and yet I have deprived thee of Hercules. If crimes are new to thee, learn of a mother to commit them." After some other strokes

of the same kind, Dejanira grows mad. She fancies she sees Megara, who pursues her with a flaming torch ; that hell opens to receive her ; that the palace shakes, and the whole universe is armed against her. These are fine images; but all this bustle made publicly by a woman with her hair dishevelled, is the sole cause that hinders her from killing herself. In Sophocles, Dejanira makes less noise, and therefore executes her design without opposition. Here she tells every body what she intends to do, and no one attempts to hinder her ; this surely is not natural.

Hyllus, it is true, deliberates whether he shall not follow his mother and endeavour to preserve her from the effects of her own frantic rage, but he is seized with a scruple of conscience. He is apprehensive that by this attention to his mother, he will incur some kind of guilt towards his murdered father : he soon stifles this ridiculous fear indeed, by a more sensible reflection, and runs after Dejanira, but it is now too late. He only deliberated as it would seem to give her time to strike the blow ; for it is necessary that Dejanira should die as Sophocles makes her. The Greek tragic writers, by following nature and good sense, which they preferred to a shining scene, never fall into these absurdities.

“ Nec desiliens imitator in arctum
“ Unde pedem referre pudor vetet, aut operis lex.”

The interlude made by the Chorus amounts to just nothing ; this is the subject of it. “ Hercules dies : so true is the oracle of “ Orpheus, that nothing is eternal here below.” This oracle, in which there is certainly nothing new or uncommon, gives occasion to the Etolians to relate the whole history of Orpheus. But is this in its place ? We would hardly pardon such a fault in a poetical novice.

A C T IV.

Hercules is brought in, and instantly begins to shew to what a height his frenzy rages : the extravagancies he uttered while he was in his senses are little, compared with the language of his madness. It is surprising, that so fine a genius as Rotrou should have so far venerated either the real or supposed name of Seneca, as to have translated these passages almost literally.

“ Fais d'un rapide cours, prince de la lumiere,
“ A tes chevaux ardens rebrousser leur carriere,

Qu'une

“ Qu'une ombre générale obscurcisse les airs,
 “ Et ne fais point de jour alors que je le perds.”

*Converte, Titan clare, anbelantes equos.
 Emitte noctem. Pereat bis mundo dies
 Qyo moriar.*

“ Alcide meurt, sans qu'en cette aventure
 “ Le cahos de retour confonde la nature !
 “ La terre en cet effort est ferme sous mes pas :
 “ Les astres font leur cours, le ciel ne se rompt pas !
 “ Juge combien ma mort ébranle ta couronne.

It is to Jupiter in person that he addresses this speech.

“ Préviens avec honneur ce honteux accident :
 “ Romps ce qu'on t'ôteroit, perds tout en me perdant.”

*Nunc pater cæcum cabos
 Reddi decebat. Hinc & hinc compagibus
 Ruptis uterque debuit frangi polus..
 Quid parcis astris ? Herculem omittis pater !*

But the best of all is, that this enthusiastic rant grows wilder and wilder. The Chorus enter into it as by contagion, so that it is a conversation of lunatics, or furies ; but as amidst the horrors of a tempest, the flashes of lightning are seen, so in this gloomy scene some shining thoughts are perceived, as when Alcides laments that he did not fall a victim to those monsters he has subdued, but to be reserved to die by the hands of a woman. “ Is it possible, adds “ he, that I should have lost so many occasions of dying gloriously ?”

“ Perdidì mortem, hei mihi,
 “ Toties honestam !”

That fine passage in Sophocles which was translated either by Cicero or Attilius is well imitated. The following is a specimen of it, which Rotrou has taken from the Latin poet:

“ Est-ce donc là ce bras dont les faits sont si rares,
 “ Ce vainqueur des Tyrans, cet effroi des barbares,
 “ Ce fléau de révolte, & de rébellions,
 “ Ce meurtrier de serpens, ce déomiteur de lions ? &c.

Yet

Yet this beautiful passage is disfigured by the false lustre of others which follow it. Hercules, ignorant of the cause of those torments which consume him, says, as he tears out his bowels, "The disease has found a retreat beyond them. Oh disease! too like Hercules." Here he gives us to understand, that his distemper is invincible, like himself. The succeeding thought would be fine, if it did not degenerate into impiety.

"D'un regard de pitié daigne percer la nue,
 "Et sur ton fils mourant arrête un peu la vue.
 "Vois, Jupin, que je meurs; mais vois de quelle mort;
 "Et donne du secours ou des pleurs à mon sort.
 "J'ai toujours dû ma vie à ma seule défense:
 "Et je n'ai point encore imploré ta puissance.
 "Quand les têtes de l'Hydre ont fait entre mes bras,
 "Cent replis tortueux, je ne te priois pas.
 "Quand j'ai dans les enfers affronté la mort même,
 "Je n'ai point reclamé ta puissance suprême;
 "J'ai de monstres divers purgé chaque élément,
 "Sans jettter vers le ciel un regard seulement.
 "Mon bras fut mon recours; & jamais le tonnerre,
 "N'a, quand j'ai combattu, grondé contre la terre:
 "Je n'ai rien imploré de ton affection,
 "Et je commence helas, cette lâchte action!
 "Aux prières enfin ce feu me fait résoudre
 "Et pour toute faveur j'implore un coup de foudre."

The Latin is closer, and has more energy.

"Tot feras vici horridas,
 "Reges, tyrannos; non tamen vultus meos
 "In estra torsti. Semper hæc nobis manus
 "Votum sponpondit."

This last thought is truly sublime. "My arm has been to me instead of a deity".

"Nulla propter me sacro
 "Micuere cælo fulmina, Hic aliquid dies.
 "Optare jussit. Primus audierit preces
 "Idemque summus. Unicum fulmen peto."

Certainly if those learned critics, who, upon the examination of the style of this tragedy, pronounced it not to be written by the author of the Medea, had given any attention to this passage, and to some others they would without any difficulty have ascribed it to him. It appears that Racine has imitated the turn I have just mentioned in

the second scene of the fourth act of his *Phedra*, where Theseus imploring Neptune to revenge him on Hippolitus, uses these terms :

“ Et toi Neptune, & toi, si jadis mon courage
 “ D’infâmes assassins nettoya ton rivage,
 “ Souviens-toi que pour prix de mes efforts heureux
 “ Tu promis d’exaucer le premier de mes vœux.
 “ Dans les longues rigueurs d’une prison cruelle,
 “ Je n’ai point imploré ta puissance immortelle..
 “ Avare du secours que j’attends de tes soins,
 “ Mes vœux t’ont réservé pour de plus grands besoins.
 “ Je t’implore aujourd’hui. Venge un malheureux pere:
 “ J’abandonne ce traître à toute ta colère,
 “ Etouffe dans son sang ses désirs effrontés :
 “ Thesée à tes fureurs connoitra tes bontés.”

This parallel shews how a skilful and delicate hand may exert its art in a happy imitation; this is not only gathering diamonds out of the dunghill of Enneis,

“ Enni de stercore gemmas:”

but it is likewise cutting and embellishing those which Rotrou has left imperfect.

Hercules, after imploring Jupiter to strike him with his thunder, addresses himself thus to Juno: “ What more wouldest thou have, imperious Goddess? thou beholdest Alcides a suppliant.” He conjures nations, cities, and the whole universe to obtain death for him, as a recompence due to his labours. This is a strain less swelling than the rest. Rotrou says nobly,

“ Pour prix de tant d’exploits je ne veux que la mort.”

Alcmona enters with Philoctetes, but we are not sufficiently prepared for their arrival. Seneca introduces Alcmena here, because Sophocles makes Hercules, when he is upon the point of fulfilling his destiny, desire that his mother and all his family may be called: but Hyllus recalls him from this wandering, and reminds him that Alcmena and all his children are far off.

In Seneca, Hercules describes his torments in a few words to Alcmena, and fills her with the deepest affliction. As for Philoctetes, he is a mute personage; so that this whole scene is nothing more than a continuation of Alcides’s complaints. He bids them throw him into the sea, to extinguish the fire that consumes him; for the rivers are not sufficient: they would soon be dried up. He even fears that the ocean will scarce have water enough to quench

his flames. Rotrou adds to this, that Alcides, when plunged in the river Peneus*, made the water hiss and boil; and that this vehement fire would convert the liquid element into itself. And a little above he says,

“ O cruelle douleur! ô tourment! ô martyre!
“ Ce lieu brûle déjà de l’air que je respire:
“ La place autour de moi fume de toutes parts,
“ Et ces humides fleurs séchent à mes regards.”

The fire of Seneca is still more active, and more contagious than that with which Hercules burned, as we may know by these verses of Rotrou’s, and by some of the great Corneille’s.

Hercules, with his usual extravagance, adds, that although he should be chained to mount Caucasus, and delivered up a prey to vultures: although as many mountains (and the poet here names them) should be heaped upon him as upon the Titans: although the whole world should fall upon him with surrounding flames, yet a fiend should not escape him; he would be incapable of fear, and repel it all. One might defy all the imaginations of the world to conceive any thing stronger than this: is it surprising, that after such ideas Hercules should fall into a swoon?

During this interval, Alcmena offers up the most ardent prayers for his cure. Hyllus appears, crying out that Dejanira is dead, not in the same simple manner that I mention it here, which would have been sufficient; but with all those poetical ornaments which cost the Latin poet so little to furnish. Hyllus should at least have added that he had done every thing in his power to prevent his mother from killing herself, since he had hastened after her; but no, he followed her as it would seem only to be a witness of her death. Rotrou perceived this error of Seneca’s, and has judiciously avoided it. Alcmena, who apparently did not hear what Hyllus had said, intreats him not to awake Hercules; but this precaution is needless. The hero recovers his spirits, and fancies himself transported into heaven: it is one of the effects of rage soothed into a calm, which is well managed. Rotrou was sensible of this beauty, and has borrowed it.

“ Quel favorable sort a fini mes désastres,
“ Et m’a fait obtenir un rang parmi les astres;
“ O divin changement! ô miracles divers!
“ Mon pere à ma venuë accourt les bras ouverts, &c.”

* Penius, a river of Thessaly: it runs between the mountains of Ossa and Olympus, and waters the valley of Tempe.

But

But this celestial spectacle vanishes with his reverie. Hercules finds himself still at Trachine, and knows Hyllus, who informs him of Dejanira's innocence and death. As soon as the hero understands that his torments are occasioned by the blood of Nessus, he resumes his tranquility, and like a sick person who is just recovered from a long delirium (in Sophocles, it is only a slumber) he says

" Mes travaux out leur fin.

" Ce que vous m'apprenez explique mon destin."

For here he remembers the oracle which we have mentioned in the tragedy of Sophocles.

" Appui des dieux & des humains ;

" Victorieux Alcide,

" Un qui sera mort de tes mains

" Sera ton homicide."

He now prepares for death, and gives his orders : a pile is to be raised upon mount Oeta ; he commands Philoctetes to set fire to it, and Hyllus to espouse Iole. Hyllus makes no scruple to promise him obedience on this article ; for the beautiful contest between the father and the son in Sophocles appeared to be too simple to the Latin poet. At length Alcides consoles Alcmena for his death, by placing before her eyes the glory she had acquired, by giving birth to an Hercules. Whether he be the son of Jupiter or not, he thinks he deserves at least to be thought his son ; and that this opinion whether true or false, will do honour to Jupiter. It is not necessary to make any observations upon this trifling, if the river Achelous his rival had been present, he might have answered him as Ovid makes him,

" Jupiter aut falsus pater est, aut criminis verus :

" Matris adulterio patrem petis."

All go out ; and the Chorus implore the Sun to give notice of Alcides's death to the four quarters of the world, that all nations may bewail the loss of their deliverer. They also foretel the apotheosis of this new Demi-God, and ask him what part of the heavens the will reside in. They wish his place may be next to the Lion, or Cancer, for fear that his looks only should trouble the course of the stars, and amaze the sun : a strain of flattery this, which would seem surprising, if long custom had not made it familiar with respect to the emperors in the mouth of Virgil, the most sensible of poets ; in those of Horace and Ovid, and of Lucan in particular, who has improved upon the thought of our Chorus. He tells

Nero plainly, that whatever part of the skies he chuses to occupy will be readily yielded to him by the Gods; and that all nature will leave him the liberty of choice. He only implores this prince not to chuse one of the two poles, for fear of depriving Rome of his mild influence, but to place himself exactly in the midst of the celestial vault, which would otherwise be in danger of sinking under such a weight.

“Tibi numine ab omni
 “Cedetur, jutisque tui natura relinquet
 “Quis Deus esse velis, ubi regnum ponere mundi.
 “Sed neque in Arctoo sedem tibi legeris orbe,
 “Nec polus adversi calidus quâ vergitur austri,
 “Unde tuam videas obliquâ fidere Romam.
 “Ætheris immaensi partem si prefferas unam
 “Sentiet axis onus. Librati pondera cœli
 “Orbe tene medio.”

The Chorus of Etolian Virgins finish their interlude with a prayer to Jupiter, that he will not permit any more monsters to appear upon earth, since Alcides is dead; or rather that he will give him a successor: needless petition! Lucretius ingeniously proves the inutility of the boasted heroism of these great men. He runs over thus the other expeditions of Hercules, and enumerates them all in a few lines.

“Quid Nemeæus enim nobis nunc magnus hiatus
 “Ille Leonis obfesset, & horrens Arcadius sus---
 “Si non victa forent, quid tandem viva nocerent?
 “Nil, ut opinor; ita ad satiatem terra ferarum
 “Nunc etiam sentit.
 “At nisi purgatum est pectus, quæ prælia nobis, &c.”

But to return to Seneca. The death of Hercules is declared by a loud peal of thunder.

A C T V.

Philoctetes comes to relate the manner of his death, and a confidant presents herself to hear it: this surely is not in the true spirit of the drama. It was not necessary to satisfy the curiosity of a servant; a recital of such importance should have been made to some person interested in the action. He would have done better to have imitated the Greek poets, and have addressed his discourse to the Chorus, who represent the people. These are faults which the commonest understanding perceives without knowing them, or being able to understand them; and they perceive them because

cause the recital thus injudiciously directed makes no impression upon them, and they are faults which ought to be most carefully avoided, and upon which the poet should have consulted his servant-maid, as Malherbe did.

This narration of Philoctetes is as shocking as the rest, which is saying all. Through an affectation of exalting Hercules, the poet has made a giant, which dwindle into a dwarf. This is the necessary consequence of such extravagant ideas; they become puerile by being supernatural. Rotrou has run headlong into the same error. I say headlong, because he has copied his model exactly, and never varies from it, but in some passages where the ridicule appeared to him to be too original. The scene in Seneca begins thus:

- NUTRIX. "Effare casus, juvenis, Herculeos precor,
"Vultuque quonam tulerit Alcides necem."
- PHILOCT. "Quo nemo vitam."
- NUTRIX. "Lætus adeòne ultimos invasit ignes ;"
- PHILOCT. "Esse jam flamas nihil ostendit ille, &c."

And in Rotrou :

- LUSCINDE. "Toi qui fçais de quel œil il vit borner ses jours,
"Fais moi de ce trépas le tragique discours,
"Quelle fut sa vertu !"
- PHILOCT. "La mort lui parut telle.
"Que la vie à nos yeux ne fut jamais si belle."
- LUSCINDE. "Dieux ! & quel lui parut ce brasier dévorant ?"
- PHILOCT. "Ce que te paroîtroit un brasier odorant, &c."

The Latin poet says more; for he will have it, that Alcides had subdued this fire; and that he placed this element among the number of his trophies. But it is quite another thing when we come to particulars: the whole forest of Oeta is overthrown. He stops to describe every tree; how each fell under the stroke; how an oak in particular long resisted the ax; how,

"Les arbres dépouillés de leurs feuillages verds
"Se virent bien plus nuds qu'au milieu des Hyvers."

And how,

"Le plus petit oiseau ne peut où se percher,
"Et toute la forêt ne devient qu'un bûcher."

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Saint Amand was not more absurd when he makes the fish look through windows, to behold the passage of the Israelites over the Red Sea.

The whole forest then is cut down to form a funeral pile, still too small for Hercules: the hero ascends it, "But with such an air, that he seems rather to be mounting to heaven than upon a funeral pile."

"This enormous heap of timber bends beneath his weight."

"Omnis, fregit impositus trubes."

He gives his arrows to Philoctetes, and intreats him to set fire to the pile; upon which, he had spread the skin of the Nemean lion, and his club: this club is the only weapon which he does not bequeath to his friend, because it would be useless to him; none but Alcides could wield it. Alcmena, who certainly in the judgment of the wise Sophocles, is too often present, plays the despairing mother. Her son is obliged to make a speech to console her, and hinder her from

"D'ôter à cette mort la qualité de bessie."

But after this last duty to his mother, the hero assumes the air of a conqueror. No warrior in his triumphal car was ever more haughty than he affects to appear upon his funeral pile: he infuses into his mother and all who are present part of that courage and noble confidence which animates his own breast. Their tears cease to flow; they imagine they behold Jupiter himself: he raises his serene eyes to heaven, and pronounces a prayer, which is the last part of his funeral eulogium. For he asserts that Jupiter cannot avoid making him a God: so many glorious actions performed by him, will force him, however reluctant, to bestow this reward on him, he merits it for his last exploit particularly, which is a striking victory over fire, the most terrible of the elements. At that instant Alcides encourages Philoctetes to draw near with his torch: he blames his slowness: his friend with eyes averted, obeys him trembling. "The pile takes fire; but one might say, that the very flames venerate the hero; he is obliged to meet them, and the fire utters a groan as it approaches him."

"Tantum ingemiscit ignis ad durum jecur."

It

It cannot be doubted, whatever certain critics may say to the contrary, but this piece is the production of him who wrote *Thyestes*, where the fire groans in the very same manner.

“ Stridet in veribus jecur :
 “ Nec facile dicam, corpora an flaminæ magis
 “ Gemuere. Piceus ignis in fumos abit,
 “ Et ipse sumus tristis, ac nebulâ gravis
 “ Non rectus exit, &c.”

This thought is even carried farther in the *Hercules upon Mount Oeta*: for besides that, the bason groans in which Atreus places the mangled limbs of Thyestes, and the fire laments; even the smoke expresses grief, and does not mount up directly. Perhaps it would not be very difficult to prove by many such comparisons, that the ten tragedies attributed to Seneca are really the productions of the same genius; but this criticism would lead us too far, and it is of no consequence to our present purpose. It is sufficient therefore to observe, that the rest of Philoctetes's narration is in the same taste, and more extravagant still than any thing in the *Medea*, *Hippolitus*, *Oedipus*, and the *Troade*, which are all indisputably given either to Seneca the philosopher, or his kinsman.

Hercules, although burning, would disdain to move, were it not to animate his mother and the rest of the spectators. “ Scarce can they imagine he is consuming in the flames: he hastens not his death, he enjoys his torments, and he satiates himself with them by little and little: he plunges his face in the flames without closing his eyes.”

Alcmena comes to interrupt, or rather to finish this recital by her tears; she holds in her hand the urn which contains the ashes of her son. This object raises new ideas, more shocking than any we have mentioned; we may judge of them by this beginning:

“ Behold this, urn ye Gods, and tremble lest you also should be the victims of death; this narrow urn contains the mighty Hercules.”

This scene is very long, and very unaffected, although entirely destined to grief. The reason of this is, that the poet has not observed that precept of Horace.

“ Si vis me flere, dolendum est
 “ Primum ipse tibi.”

How-

396 HERCULES ON MOUNT OETA.

However Alcmena seems to weep, or rather the poet designs she should; but her tears instead of resembling Aurora's, are, if I be allowed the expression, nothing but distilled amber. Enough has been seen of this kind of long drawn thoughts; the rest would be tedious like the piece itself. But to conclude: Hercules now deified appears in the air, and forbids his friends to profane his glorious destiny, by unworthy tears. Alcmena can scarce believe her eyes; at length she and the Chorus resolve to credit the apotheosis. We have dwelt the longer upon this piece, because it seemed of importance to make the reader acquainted with the genius of that age, in which the Senecas and their copiers were the reigning taste. By this contrast between the Greeks and Latins, the strength and weakness of their several ages will be better understood, and in what our theatre has borrowed from both.

HER-

H E R C U L E S D Y I N G.

A

T R A G E D Y B Y R O T R O U.

ONE may say of this piece, that it is the second edition of Seneca's revived, corrected, and enlarged. Rotrou, who admired, and who understood the Greek poets, has here had the misfortune to be seduced by the apparent pomp of Seneca's tragedies, and in the choice of a model to prefer him to Sophocles. This arises from his not distinguishing any more than Corneille antients from ancients; nor that which has had the stamp of universal approbation set upon it, in those antients which posterity has agreed to reverence.

A C T I.

He opens the scene by introducing Hercules, who praises himself as extravagantly as he does in the Latin poet, which Rotrou was so fond of translating. As for the unity of place, we must not expect to find it exactly observed in Rotrou. However, he supposes Hercules to be at Trachine, and great part of the action passes in the palace.

Dejanira, who suspects her husband's passion for Iole, comes to demand an explanation of him: he endeavours in vain to conceal the truth from her. She is too well informed to be the dupe of his artifice; she preserves her suspicions, and meditates her revenge with equal jealousy, but much less rage than in the Latin poet. The French poet has thought proper to cut the long scenes in pieces, and scatters the fragments over his tragedy, by which

means he makes his acts pompous. I desire the reader to attend closely to all these terms; this is the only artifice of many poets, and the question is, whether this is natural, nature being the true rule of composition.

Dejanira retires, and Hercules appears again with his Iole, who is working tapestry in another apartment of the palace. This is a scene of gallantry, which gives us no great idea of Hercules, and which makes us expect mighty things from Iole; but the spectator is deceived in both. For this Hercules, abandoned to a passion which dishonours him, and which it would have been better to have thrown into a narration, becomes at last the real Alcides: whereas Iole, at first so prudent and generous, who reproaches Hercules with sacrificing Oechalia to a criminal love, plays nothing near so fine a part in the sequel: she is but a subordinate character, and introduced merely to authorise the jealousy of Dejanira. Sophocles, and even Seneca shew her but just enough to produce this effect.

The queen enters and surprises Mars with Venus, as she herself says. Hercules has nothing to offer in his defence: his passion is discovered; therefore he has recourse to weak excuses, which only serve to increase his confusion; and he makes almost as bad a figure in the presence of his wife as he did before in that of his mistress. Alcides, thus harshly treated by both, insults Dejanira's grief, and threatens Iole with the death of Arcas, a young prince whom she loved, and to whom she was destined by her parents before the ruin of her country. Such is the first act, wherein it is easy to discern what Rotrou has added to Seneca, in order to accommodate his piece to the taste of a French audience.

A C T II.

Lucinda, Dejanira's confidant begins the second act here, as in Seneca; that is, by preparing the spectators for the sight of this princess in her rage. Accordingly Dejanira appears such as she has been described, and such as Seneca has painted her, with all the horrors of jealous fury; which however terminate in nothing more than in tinging a robe with the blood of Nessus. This scene is a very literal translation of the Latin one, with all its faults. But the great bustle Dejanira makes here would seem to threaten something worse than a simple philtre; yet it is in making one that

all

all this affected despair ends in, and it is but by chance that she remembers it after having refused the offer of a magician. She suspects this sort of charms :

“ He quel charme assez fort
“ Pourroit sur son esprit faire un utile effort?”

She had said even more than this before ; how happens it then, that all on a sudden, she has recourse to a philtre, which she had despised, which she had never made trial of, and yet expects it will succeed ?

Iole presents herself very unseasonably before Dejanira : she solicits her to put her to death, that she may be freed from the importunity of Hercules.

“ Vous-même portez lui ce cœur qu'il me demande.”

Dejanira, who believes this discourse to be only an artful veil to conceal the infidelity of Alcides, and his intelligence with Iole, treats her very harshly ; and does not spare even the terms *infamous*, *impudent*, and *shameless* : words of reproach which were fashionable in the last age ; but, which the politeness of ours has banished ; substituting in their stead, these softer ones : *barbarian*, *cruel*, *perfidious*, and the like. What then would Homer say, if he was to revive in the different times of our language ?

Iole, thus persecuted on every side, abandons herself to despair ; but her fears are more for Arcas than herself. Death has nothing in it terrible to her. That instant Arcas appears at the gate of his prison in which Hercules had confined him, and says to Iole :

“ Quelle heureuse nouvelle
“ Recevrai-je aujourd'hui d'une bouche si belle ?
“ Que vient-elle annoncer au malheureux Arcas ?
“ IOLE. La mort.
“ ARCAS. Et qui sera l'auteur de mon trépas !
“ IOLE. Moi-même.”

Iole explains this enigma, and informs her lover that Hercules is determined either to separate them, or to take their lives ; but at the same time she vows to him so constant a faith, that they will both, she says, bless their death and their murderer.

A C T III.

In this act the scene shifts from the prison of Arcas to a temple, where Hercules with Philoctetes offers a sacrifice to Jupiter, in gratitude for the conquest of Oechalia and Iole. His whole train prostrate themselves before the altar, and the hero pronounces a very noble prayer for the peace and happiness of the universe. It concludes thus:

“ Qu'une éternelle paix regne enter les mortels !
 “ Qu'on ne verse du sang que dessus les autels !
 “ Que la mer soit sans flots ! que jamais vent n'excite
 “ Contre l'art des Nochers le courroux d'Amphitrite ?
 “ Et que la foudre enfin demeure après mes faits
 “ Dans les mains de mon pere un inutile faix !

In this sacred ceremony, Alcides appears dreſt with extraordinary magnificence. He wears the vesture that Dejanira has tinged with the infectious blood of the Centaur. The effect is so instantaneous, that Hercules starting up, cries out,

“ Mais qu'elle prompte flamme en mes veines s'allume ?
 “ Quelle soudaine ardeur jusqu'ax os me consume ?
 “ Quel poison communique à ce linge fatal
 “ La vertu qui me brûle ? O tourment sans égal !
 “ Ouvre, enfer, à mes cris tes cavernes profondes,
 “ Prête contre ce feu le secours de tes ondes.
 “ Souffre Alcide là bas, non pas comme autre fois
 “ Pour défarmer la parque, & ruiner ses loix ;
 “ Mais Alcide souffrant d'in supportables peines ;
 “ Et qui porte déjà les enfets dans ses veines.”

Lychas, being asked from whom he received this robe, answers, that it was from the queen ; upon which Hercules grasps his club, pursues this unfortunate domestic off the stage, and kills him.

This is the beginning of Alcides's madness, which make up all the remaining part of the play. Seneca has furnished Rotrou with sufficient to strew throughout three whole acts.

Hercules returns, and makes a scene truly fine, by the dignity which the poet has given it, after having corrected the swelling pomp of the Latin, of which he only preserves the substance. It concludes with his vowed vengeance upon Dejanira ; but while he goes in search of her, she enters on the other side of the stage,

to impart to her confidant her fears on occasion of the prodigy she had so lately seen, and which had been already mentioned; namely, that the Centaur's blood when exposed to the air, became a devouring fire. Agis, one of Hercules's confidants meets the queen, and holds the same discourse with her as Hyllus does with his mother in Seneca. He advises her to make her escape, and informs her of what had happened to Hercules, in the same manner as in the Latin poet: only that Agis always holds the place of Hyllus; for Rotrou has endeavoured to avoid the perplexity of putting the son in opposition to the mother, in such a situation. Dejanira, although innocent, is torn with remorse: she resolves to kill herself; her senses are disordered, and she fancies the whole universe is armed against her.

“ Ah, je découvre enfin l'appareil de ma perte,
 “ D'affreuses légions la campagne est couverte:
 “ Le juste bras du Ciel sur ma tête descend,
 “ Les enfers vont s'ouvrir, & la terre se fend.

This whole scene is full of fire, and has in it many striking passages.

A C T IV.

Hercules appears again without being able to find Dejanira, yet this was no difficult matter; but it is necessary that this princess should kill herself; and that Hercules, disappointed in his vengeance, should display upon the stage those sentiments which he borrows from Seneca. Rotrou has spoiled none of those passages; he has even softened them; but Philoctetes, who always attends him, is as useless a person as Agis. Their business is only to be confidants and spectators of what passes. In this scene, of which we have already given some extracts, the hero recounts his great exploits, his former strength, and his present torments: it consists of pompous exclamations and passionate complaints, of which the genius of Sophocles is the first author.

The French poet copies Seneca in introducing Alcmena; but this princess, alike inactive in both, only comes to increase by her presence the groans of her son Hercules, and to furnish him with new thoughts by her frequent interruptions. This scene, as in the Latin tragedy, is heightened by the wild transports and the fainting of Alcides, who afterwards retires only to plunge himself a second time in the river; and that Agis may have an opportunity

tunity of relating the death of Dejanira to Alcmena. Rotrou has judiciously dismissed his hero before this recital was made: for if he had heard it, he would have known his destiny.

Hercules returns without being relieved by the waters of Peneus, and without meeting Dejanira, whom he sought. He supposes that she conceals herself from his rage in some unknown asylum. The spectator, without knowing it, enters into all these pretences; and it must be confessed that the enchantment of tragic action serves often to hide this sort of defects which have been introduced into the French theatre. Alcides is now informed that Dejanira has killed herself; that her crime was not the effect of rage, but imprudence; and lastly, that the robe he wore was poisoned with the Centaur's blood. These last words open the eyes of Hercules, who calls to mind the oracle he had received, as in Sophocles and Seneca; so that the fifth act is wholly made up of the death and apotheosis of the hero. In one article only Rotrou differs from Seneca here: he perceived that the last act of the Latin tragedy was very deficient in action, and to supply it he makes Hercules conclude the fourth act with this speech to Philoctetes, to whom he bequeaths his arrows:

“ Toi, fidèle témoin des conquêtes d' Alcide,
 “ Gloire de la valeur & du sang Péantide,
 “ Reçois ce dernier gage; & te sers à ton tour
 “ Des ces traits teints du sang qui me prive du jour,
 “ Mais, & ressouviens-toi d'accomplir ma priere,
 “ Fais sur le sein d'Arcas leur épreuve premiere.
 “ Il possède le cœur d'une jeune beauté,
 “ Dont trop indignement le mien fut rebuté.
 “ Que ta main de ces traits sur ma tombe l'immole,
 “ Et qu'il y rende l'ame aux yeux même d'Iole.

The revenge which he resolves to take upon Arcas is a loose stone to fill up the vacuity of the following scenes; but we shall soon see that this is a weak foundation of a very bad edifice; for first, is not this revenge unworthy of the great Alcides so near becoming a Deity? was it not enough that in the first transports of a rejected passion, he had even threatened Iole with this sacrifice? but if he was resolved to execute it, why defer it so long, and leave to another person the care of revenging after his death an idle love, which

which was no longer of any consequence? This stroke has certainly nothing of heroism in it.

A C T IV.

Philoctetes puts himself to the expence, as in Seneca, to relate in a most pompous manner the death of Hercules to a servant. The hero, he says, when he was upon the pile, reiterated the sentence he had pronounced against Arcas.

Alcmena enters with an urn, and says,

“ En ce vase chétif tout Hercule est enclos :
 “ Je puis en une main enfermer ce héros :
 “ Ceci fut la terreur de la terre & de l'onde,
 “ Et je porte celui qui soutint tout le monde.”

But instead of abandoning herself to a forced strain of lamentation, of which in Seneca there is no end, she adopts those sentiments of vengeance with which her son expired, and requires Philoctetes to fulfil the last commands of Hercules, by putting Arcas to death. Philoctetes is so sensible of the meanness of this revenge, that it is with great reluctance he resolves to obey: he justifies Arcas, he pities Iole, but Alcmena is inexorable; and Philoctetes, in spite of himself, is obliged to perform the office of an executioner. Arcas is bound to the tomb of Hercules in the back part of the scene; but Iole presenting her bosom to Philoctetes's arrows, demands either life for her lover, or death for herself. Philoctetes is moved: but constrained to be the minister of Alcmena's rage, whom this delay irritates still more; he prepares to pierce the heart of Arcas, when Iole throwing herself before her lover, cries,

“ Traître, j'attens le coup que ta main lui prépare :
 “ En ce sein innocent pouffe ton trait vainqueur :
 “ Tu frapperas Arcas, puisqu'il est dans mon cœur.”

She asks if she is brought to a savage country, where they gorge themselves with human blood, and why Alcides sought in the infernal regions what he might have found in his own family?

“ Quel monstre plus sanguinaire, quel plus cruel Cerbere
 “ Que ses propres parens, avoit-il à défaire ?
 “ Que voit-on en ces lieux que des objets d'horreur,
 “ Et qu'y respire-t'on que meurtre & que fureur ?

She

She has but too much cause for these invectives; and it cannot be conceived how Alcmena should be cruel enough to insist upon having the blood of an innocent prince shed upon the tomb of her son. Iole, although inactive in the rest of the piece, plays a distinguished part here; but it is at the expence of Alcmena and Hercules. The fair captive unable either to move the hearts of her persecutors, or to save Arcas, draws a poniard from underneath her robe, and threatens to stab herself if her lover is sacrificed. She is disarmed, and the victim is upon the point of being slaughtered, when a peal of thunder stays the lifted arm of Philoctetes. The skies open, and Hercules appears on a cloud. He bestows life and Iole upon Arcas; he forbids them to mourn, for Alcides is now a God, and commands that altars should be erected to him. This machine is as improper here as in Seneca, and the episode of Arcas renders it still more faulty. This is in a sense contrary to that of Horace: *Dignus vindice nodus**.

* Horat de Art. Poet.

END of the TRAGEDIES of SOPHOCLES.

THE

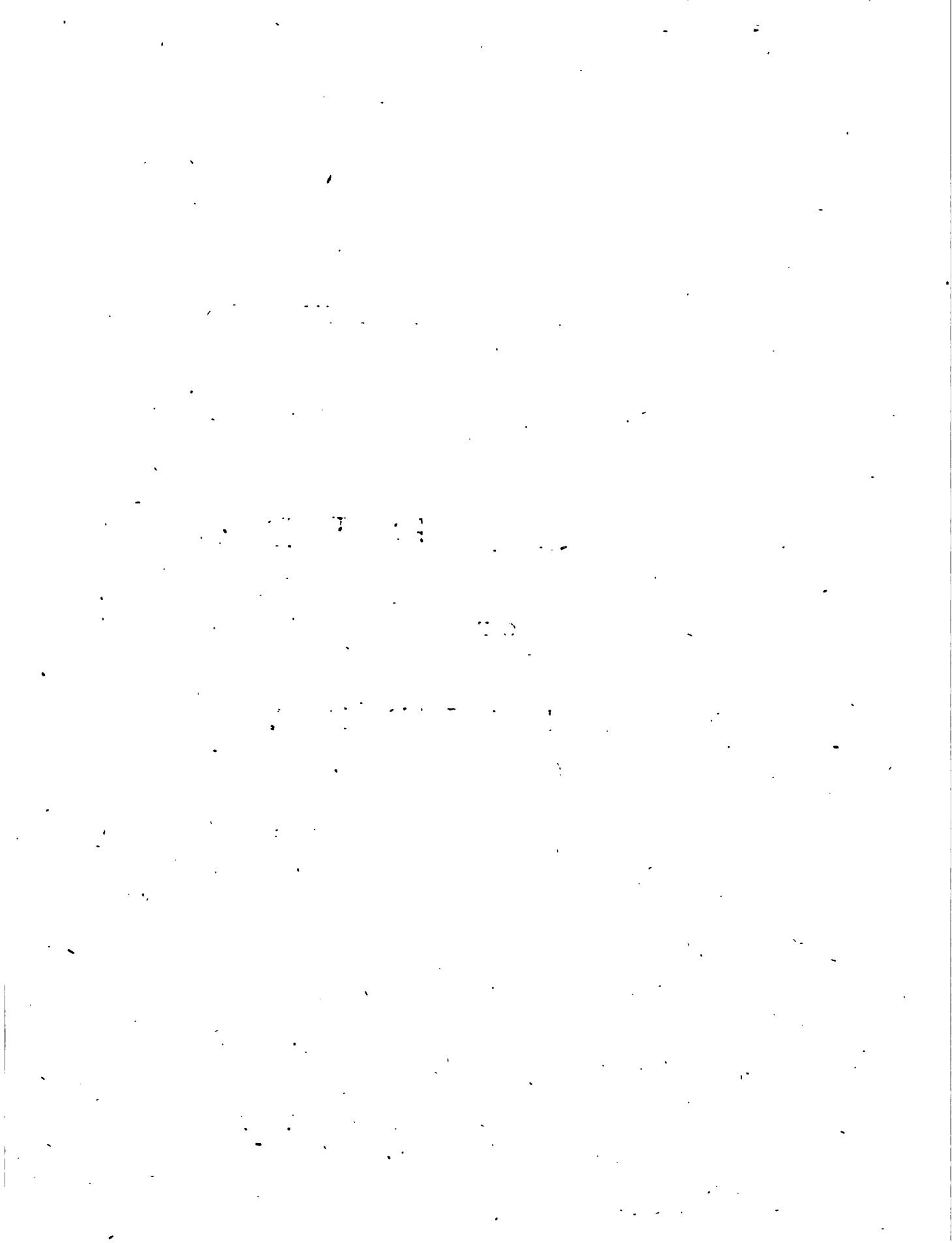


THE
TRAGEDIES
OF
EURIPIDES.



VOL. II.

R r



A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

"EURIPIDES, says Aristotle, although not very exact nor
"charfized in the subject of his plays, has yet more of the tragic
"passion than any other poet." Such is the character of this poet
summed up in a few words; and this is sufficient to bring to our
remembrance what has been said in the preliminary discourses.
There is in the negligence of Euripides a kind of grace which
may ballance the regularity of Sophocles. Without examining them
too closely, we shall find certain errors in the former, which the
latter carefully avoided; but we cannot chuse but pardon them in
consideration of those two tragic passions, pity and terror, with
which the mind is agitated throughout all his pieces: that he at-
tained to such a height of excellence in what is the true end of
tragedy was owing to his having studied nature more than art; and
that in his compositions he rather followed the emotions of his
heart, than the suggestions of his wit. Therefore it is almost im-
possible to preserve these beauties in a translation; for should we
fail to hit that soft languor, that delicate tenderness, which make
the soul of his stile, we run the danger of making him appear flat
and languishing. In the same manner Racine, translated into a
foreign language, would blush to see himself so much disguised, and
would refuse to acknowledge his own likeness. Lively thoughts,
a close nervous style full of fire, may be rendered successfully in
another tongue, but not those soft yet careless graces and a diffusive
style supported only by its beautiful simplicity. Euripides writ
according to the situation in which he found his own mind. Now
he was naturally melancholy, philosophic, and an enemy to joy:
his disposition less lively than tender, great sensibility of heart, and
his character, which is a little fretful and prone to lamentation,
appears even in his writings. He had not indeed any great sub-
jects for joy; and it is pretended that he found some for uneasiness,
in two women whom he married successively. Some also say,
that during a journey, he lost a wife whom he tenderly loved, two
sons and a daughter: their deaths were occasioned by eating some
bad champignons; and that he composed an epigram on this sub-
ject, of which this is the sense: "Oh sun, who traversest the
"immense space of the heavens, never didst thou behold calamity
"like mine! What! a mother, two sons and a daughter torn from
"me in one day!" In this style so simple, so pathetic, so tender

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

and plaintive, it is easy to know Euripides : he always paints himself. We see him in those four plays which are entirely translated ; and we shall also see him in the fourteen following ones, which are delivered more at length than those of Sophocles. Those pieces which could be translated are, and I flatter myself the reader will lose nothing of the rest, that he will find again Euripides entire ; and that he will be pleased with my following a method sometimes direct, sometimes indirect, without which I may venture to assert that it would have been impossible to have given the French a view of the Greek Theatre.

If we would read the tragedies in the natural order, according to the date of the subjects, they must stand thus :

I O N.
T H E B A C C H A N A L I A N S.
M E D E A.
H I P P O L I T U S.
A L C E S T I S.
H E R C U L E S M A D.
T H E P H E N I C I A N S.
T H E S U P P L I A N T S.
I P H I G E N I A I N A U L I S.
R H E S U S.
T H E T R O J A N S.
H E C U B A.
T H E H E R A C L I D E S.
E L E C T R A.
O R E S T E S.
A N D R O M A C H E.
I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S.
H E L E N A.

The number of tragedies composed by Euripides was seventy-five. The Cyclops is not mentioned here for reasons which have been given elsewhere.

T H E

THE
TRAGEDIES
OF
EURIPIDES.



H E C U B A.

AFTER the taking of Troy, the Greeks withdrew into the Thracian Chersonesus, where Polymestor then reigned. They carried with them Hecuba, and the principal ladies of Troy, who were divided among them as captives. There as they paid new funeral honours to Achilles, whose body was buried in the Phrygian fields, the shade of this hero appeared unto them upon the empty tomb, which had been erected to him, and declared to the assembled Greeks, that if they hoped for a happy departure from the Chersonesus, they must give him Polyxena, the daughter of Hecuba and Priam, as a reward which was due to him, and which he had reserved for himself. In a truce agreed to between the Trojans and the Greeks, this young princess had been promised by Priam to Achilles; and as her father was preparing to perform his engagement, Achilles was slain by Paris and Deiphobus. The Greeks, determined to satisfy the manes of the vanquisher of Troy, sacrificed Polyxena to him, notwithstanding the tears and intreaties of the unhappy mother; so much the more unhappy as her son Polydore had been treacherously murdered a few days before, by Polymestor. Before the last misfortunes of Troy, this child had been by Priam confided to the Thracian king, together with great treasures, to serve one day as a resource to his country and ruined family. When Ilion became a prey to the Greeks, Polymestor forgot his ancient ally, and avarice prevailed over his fidelity.

He murdered the little prince, that he might securely enjoy his treasures.

*Ill-fated Priam, when the Grecian pow'rs
 With a close siege begirt the Dardan tow'rs,
 No more confiding in the strength of Troy,
 Sent to the Thracian prince the hapless boy;
 With mighty treasures to support him there,
 Removed from all the dangers of the war.
 This wretch, when Ilion's better fortunes cease,
 Clos'd with the proud victorious arms of Greece;
 Broke thro' all sacred laws, and uncontroll'd
 Destroyed his royal charge, to seize the gold.

PITT.

The distress of Hecuba, now become a captive and deprived of her children, with the revenge she takes on Polymestor form the subject of this tragedy. The persons are, the Ghost of Polydore, Hecuba, a Chorus of Trojan captives, Polyxena, Ulysses, Talthibius, one of Hecuba's women, Agamemnon, and Polymestor.

A C T I.

The shade of Polydore rises out of the earth, and stands before the entrance of Hecuba's house, where the scene is laid. What Aristotle calls the prologue is spoken by this Shade. It is necessary to remember once for all, that Euripides in that case is less scrupulous than Sophocles. The latter always found the secret to make his subject be understood without speaking to the spectators; but Euripides either knew not, or would not practice this refinement of art. He thought that it would be easier to conciliate the attention of a numerous assembly, and that his subjects would be less perplexed and better understood if they were exposed nakedly and without disguise. This he has almost always done, by means of his prologues, and for which he has been greatly commended by certain commentators, as a fine invention. A clear exposition of the subject may be made consistent with probability, without its being necessary to say, "I am Polydore, and you shall see such and such things." Although we may also say with Despreaux of the person who first speaks,

" J'aimerois encor mieux qu'il déclinât son nom,
 " Et dit, je suis Oreste; ou bien Agamemnon,

* Virgil. B. 3. v. 63.

" Que

“ Que d'aller par un tas de confuses merveilles
 “ Sans rien dire à l'esprit étourdir les oreilles.
 “ Le sujet n'est jamais assez-tôt expliqué*.”

Here then it is Polydore, or rather his ghost, who explains the subject very minutely. He relates the manner in which Priam trusted him to the care of Polymestor, with the treasures as a reserve in case Troy should be vanquished. He unfolds the treachery and avarice of the Thracian king, who had caused him to be murdered and thrown into the sea, three days before the arrival of Hecuba in Chersonesus. He also mentions the sacrifice of Polyxena, which the shade of Achilles exacted from the Greeks: in a word, he brings the whole dramatic action to that point where it is to begin, by declaring what precedes it. But what is more intolerable, he anticipates the principal events: at length he sees Hecuba appear, and he withdraws, crying, “ Ah unfortunate mother, how differ-
 “ rent is thy situation now to that which I have formerly seen thee
 “ in! Some God, the enemy of our house, has made thy miseries
 “ equal to thy past felicity.”

Hecuba no longer a queen but a prisoner of war, alike loaden with years and afflictions, causes her women to conduct her to the palace of Polymestor. “ Oh day! cries she, Oh night! what horrid dreams have I been tortured with?” She means those which she had had the preceding night, concerning her son Polydore, and her daughter Polyxena. She relates the latter to the Trojan women who attend her. She dreamt she saw a furious wolf which forced away a hind from her knees; and that the ghost of Achilles appeared, and demanded one of the captive women as a present. “ Oh Gods! cries she, avert from my daughter this fatal presage.”

One of the women of the Chorus, a captive as well as all the others, confirms but too well the truth of this dream. She informs the queen, that the Greeks had assembled to deliberate upon the demand made by Achilles; that Agamemnon, to whose share Cassandra had fallen, refused to comply with the unhuman request of Achilles: that the sons of Theseus had acknowledged that there was a necessity of offering a victim to him, but that Cassandra and not Polyxena must be that victim: others, she tells the queen,

* Despreaux Art. Poet. ch. 3.

were of opinion, that the shade of Achilles ought to be satisfied without any restriction; and that the army was divided in their sentiments till Ulysses, by an artful insinuation, had turned the balance for those who were for sacrificing Polyxena, and was accordingly coming to lead her to the altar. The Chorus advise Hecuba to implore Agamemnon and the Gods: this is all she can now do.

The wretched queen here breaks into an extasy of grief very difficult to represent: she is a mother. This is the only good that fortune has left her, and the Greeks would now deprive her of this only good which the Gods had spared. She runs distractedly from place to place: she calls her daughter with loud cries. Polyxena hears her, and comes out of her apartment, which is supposed to be near. Hecuba has not power to speak: she is a mother in the last excess of despair: a kind of painting in which Euripides excelled. At length the fatal truth escapes her: "The Greeks, "my daughter, have decreed thy death." Polyxena at this news is only concerned for her mother, and looks upon death as a trifle. This scene is very short, and finely wrought up.

A C T II.

Ulysses now arrives; the occasion of his coming being so well known, renders this scene extremely interesting. He supposes that Hecuba is already informed of what is required of her; and therefore only barely exhorts her to submit patiently to her misfortune. After the first expressions of her grief, such as might be expected from a mother, Hecuba demands of Ulysses a moment's conversation. "Thou rememberest, says she to him, the time when "thou wert surprised in Troy disguised like a spy. Helen knew "thee and informed me of it, thy tears moved my compassion, "and I preserved thee from certain death; a death which thou "hadst well deserved." Ulysses acknowledges all this to be true; like an able orator, he seems to enter into the arguments of his adversary only to urge his own more forcibly. This is artfully managed by the poet, who thus paints the well-known genius of Ulysses. Hecuba concludes, "Since thou ownest this to be true, "art thou not the most ungrateful of all mortals; thou who hast "condemned my daughter to death? why must the tombs of the "dead be bathed with blood, if victims must needs be offered to "them? It is Helen, and not my daughter who ought to be sacrificed. Was not Helen the cause of Achilles's death? Hear me,

" adds

" adds she, hear what require of thee : I have seen thee suppliant
 " at my feet ; thou now beholdest me a suppliant in my turn. Thus
 " prostrate at thy knees, all the gratitude I require of thee is that
 " favour which I first bestowed on thee. Do not, oh do not tear
 " my daughter from me ! Alas ! has there not been blood enough
 " shed already ? Polyxena is my only treasure ; with her I lose the
 " remembrance of all my woes : she is to me instead of Troy, of a
 " scepter, of the support that I have lost. Suits it with conque-
 " rors to abuse their victory ? Ah no ! the happy should not flatter
 " themselves that their good fortune will last for ever. I was
 " once happy, and what am I now ? one day has robbed me of all
 " my felicity. Oh prince have pity on my age ! have pity on a
 " mother ! Go, go to the Greeks, shew them how shameful it is
 " to massacre in the sanctuary of an altar, those women whom
 " their fury spared even amidst the horror of battles. Are not
 " your laws regarding sanctuaries as sacred for captives as for free
 " persons ? Oh speak to them, prince ; thy rank will on this occa-
 " sion be more powerful still than thy eloquence."

The Trojan women are justly affected with this speech ; but Ulysses has less sensibility. " Oh Hecuba ! replies he, listen to my voice ; let not thy rage poison the innocence of my words : doubt not but I am ready to save thee, as thou hast saved me. I glory in this acknowledgment of thy mercy ; neither will I disavow the advice I gave to the Greeks assembled in council. One of our greatest heroes demands Polyxena : she must be given him. It is the reproach of states to suffer the brave and the cowardly to be confounded together by an equal distribution of rewards. Achilles, I acknowledge, merits to be distinguished by us : he fell like a hero for his country. How dishonourable would it be for us who have conquered through him, if we should forget him after his death ? say, what would be the consequence if we should have occasion to assemble Greece again for another expedition ? what would our warriors say, if they behold the dead neglected ? would they not prefer life to the inevitable perils of war ? as for me, easily contented while I live, I have no other ambition but to have my ashes honoured." (A powerful motive with the Greeks : they also paid great regard to the last requests of the dying, or those whose apparitions they supposed they saw.) " If thou complainest, adds he, of a duty to thee so fatal, reflect that we have among us many women and aged men as miserable as thyself. Alas ! how many Grecian husbands are

" under the ruins of Troy? Endeavour to support this calamity
 " with fortitude; as for us, if we do ill to honour valour after
 " death, we consent that thou shouldest blame us for our folly;
 " but the Trojans are ignorant of what they owe to the memory
 " of faithful friends and the illustrious dead. It is the regard we
 " pay them that has rendered Greece flourishing; and the want of
 " this discernment has loaded thee with punishments conformable
 " to the injustice of thy neglect."

Hecuba finding her intreaties ineffectual, turns towards Polyxena, who is present. " Oh my daughter! says she, thou seest him, " he is unmoved by all my supplications; do thou try whether " thou hast more power than thy wretched mother. All that the " tenderest grief can inspire, employ to save thy life; fall prostrate " at the feet of this inexorable prince; endeavour to touch his " heart with pity. He is a father, urge that tender motive."

Polyxena casts a modest but firm glance at Ulysses, and speaks to him thus: " I perceive, Ulysses, that thou concealest thy hand, " thou turnest thy face from me;" (this was to hinder her from touching his hand or his chin according to the manner of suppliants) " thou dreadest my supplications, but dismiss thy fears, " from me thou shalt hear neither sighs nor intreaties. I am ready " to follow thee; thou requirest my death, and death is my most " ardent wish. No, I will not wound my fame by a base fear of " death. Alas! why should life be dear to me? the daughter of " a king, and destined for the bride of kings, formerly a queen, " surrounded with pomp and magnificence, and except in im- " mortality, equal to the Goddesses themselves, but now your slave. " This title only makes death pleasing to me, reserved perhaps to be " the property of any cruel master who will deign to purchase me: " the sister of Hector shall be debased to the vilest employments " that are given to slaves." Here the poet enumerates these employments; such as drawing water, spinning, making bread, and the like: a detail, which if it makes us look upon past ages with pity, is however not to make us suppose that what the poet says was impertinent. Polyxena goes on: " I who was thought wor- " thy of a king for my husband must become the purchased wife of " some mean wretch. No no, I will die free, and carry with me " to the shades my fame unstained. Let us go, Ulysses, lead me " to the altar, sacrifice me; there is no happiness here for Polyx- " ena. Ah, mother, seek not by thy tears and intreaties to pre- " serve my life! suffer me to die rather than see me exposed to in- " dig-

" dignities unworthy of my sex and rank: a mind injured to calamities may support them with fortitude; but oh what efforts will it cost first? death is far better than life loaded with dis-honour."

The Chorus admire her courage and resolution. "Alas!" replies "Hecuba, what endless grief will these noble sentiments produce?" Then turning to Ulysses, "Oh prince! adds she, if thou wouldest offer an acceptable victim to the son of Peleus, without loading thyself with infamy, it is I, and not my daughter, that thou must sacrifice: lead Hecuba to his tomb, pierce this bosom with a thousand wounds; 'tis I who gave birth to Paris, by whom Achilles was slain."

ULYSSES. It is Polyxena, and not thee, whom the shade of Achilles demands.

HECUBA. Well, join me to my daughter; thou wilt then have two victims.

ULYSSES. It is too much to offer Polyxena without adding Hecuba to the sacrifice. Oh that both could be spared!

HECUBA. Yes, we will die together; thou shalt be forced to unite us in this sad sacrifice.

ULYSSES. Ha! who will force me? I know no master here.

HECUBA. I, I will force thee: thus faster bound to my Polyxena than the ivy to the tree, I will never, never quit her.

ULYSSES. Oh, queen, be calm, listen to wiser counsels!

HECUBA. No, I will hear nothing more; I will not yield my daughter.

ULYSSES. Then I must force her from thy arms.

POLYXENA. Oh hear me both! Ulysses, do not aggravate the affliction of a wretched mother. O my mother, yield to our conquerors! spare thyself the indignity of beholding me dragged with violence to the altar. (In the original this is express still stronger) Permit thy daughter to embrace thee for the last time; and for the last time to call thee by the soft name of mother: Oh my mother, I am going to the silent tomb!

HECUBA. And I must live a slave.

POLYXENA. I shall not behold that bridal day which I had so much reason to expect.

HECUBA. Oh my wretched daughter! Oh far more wretched mother!

POLYXENA. I go, never more to behold thee; banished for ever to the regions of the dead.

HECUBA. Oh! who will take from me this miserable life?

POLYXENA. The daughter of a king, I die a slave.

HECUBA. Thy mother will die so too, after beholding all her numerous posterity perish*.

POLYXENA. What shall I say from thee to thy son Hector, and to Priam, thy husband?

HECUBA. Tell them my miseries have reached their utmost height.

Hecuba and Polyxena continue thus for a few moments the expression of their mutual grief, such as nature herself dictates. Polyxena takes leave of her mother, and of her sister Cassandra, and her brother Polydore, although the two latter are absent. At the mention of Polydore, Hecuba, by a natural foreboding, says, that she doubts whether he be still alive; and Polyxena endeavours to banish this fear. It is not surprising that Hecuba, although she had been three days in Thrace, should be ignorant of Polydore's fate. King Polymestor is supposed absent, and gone to the borders of his kingdom; and Hecuba with great probability thinks her son is with him. At length Polyxena says to Ulysses, "Con-
" duct me hence and veil my head, (it was the custom to veil the
" victims) for I find the tears of a mother affect me too much.
" Oh sun! I may at least pronounce thy name, since I shall never
" more enjoy thy rays, except in that interval when I am between
" the sword and the tomb of Achilles. Adieu." Hecuba perceives
herself fainting; she calls her daughter; she stretches out her arms
to her, she makes fruitless efforts to retain her, and swooning, falls
into the arms of her women, while Ulysses leads Polyxena off the
stage. It must be confessed there was great cruelty in these sacrifices; but it ought at least to be attributed to the situation the Greeks were in; their superstition and policy rendered them necessary. This consideration only can justify the part Ulysses acts here.

The Chorus express their sorrow as usual, in Stanzas; they turn upon the melancholy servitude which the Trojan ladies reflected on with greater horror after Polyxena had been forced away. These Stanzas are eloquent complaints arising from that sympathy the unhappy feel at the sight of another's misfortune. Hecuba remains prostrate on the ground, abandoned to grief and despair.

* In the original it is, My fifty children.

A C T III.

Talthybius, an officer belonging to Agamemnon, comes to her from this monarch: he asks the Chorus for her, and they shew him where she lies, almost without motion, and wrapt up in her veil. Struck with the melancholy sight he cries, "Oh Ju-
 " piter! what are we to think of the Gods? are mortals indeed
 " their care? have we not reason to believe, that satisfied with
 " their own happiness, they abandon the rest to chance? See
 " here a striking instance: this queen of the wealthy Phrygians, this
 " wife of the once happy Priam; her kingdom is destroyed, and
 " herself reduced to slavery, loaded with years and sorrows, deprived
 " of her children, and prostrate in the dust!" These are impious
 sentiments; but that system of fatality spread among the people was
 the cause of their suffering such discourse as the effect of a sud-
 den emotion, which the heart disavowed.

Hecuba is intreated to rise: she suppresses her anguish a moment to ask who it is that is come to insult her misery? Talthybius tells her that he is sent to her by Agamemnon. "Ah! cries Hecuba,
 " do they send for me to sacrifice me? let us go, I am ready, lead
 " me to the altar." "No, replies the herald, I am sent to desire thou
 " wilt pay the last duties to thy daughter, who is already sacri-
 " ficed." This horrid news plunges Hecuba again into an excess of grief, "Ah! how were you able to sacrifice her, barbarous as
 " you are?" yet she insists upon knowing the particulars of her death: particulars so shocking to the ears of a mother. I know not whether this will appear natural to us, notwithstanding the delicacy with which the poet manages it; for Hecuba fears that her daughter was not sacrificed to the manes of Achilles, but to the policy and hatred of the Greeks. Talthybius therefore begins his recital like Æneas: "What thou requirest of me will open a new
 " source of grief. This fatal spectacle has already cost me tears
 " enough; must I needs shed more? The whole army was assem-
 " bled round Achilles's tomb, where the sacrifice was to be per-
 " formed. *The son of that hero took Polyxena's hand, and led
 " her up to the top of the tomb. I was near with several young
 " Grecians who were chosen to hold the victim. The son of
 " Achilles took a golden cup and poured libations to the manes of
 " his father: he made me a sign to bid the assembly observe a

* Neoptolemus.

" holy

" holy silence ; I obeyed, all stood mute. Oh son of Peleus ! cried
 " he, receive these sacred libations which call the souls of the dead
 " from Pluto's gloomy kingdom. Come and satiate thyself with
 " the pure blood of this innocent victim, which I and the whole
 " army offer to thee. But oh, be favourable to us ! release our
 " vessels from this port, and give us a happy return to our native
 " country. He said, and the whole army joined in his prayers.
 " That instant he grasped the sacred knife, and ordered the Greeks
 " who surrounded the victim to seize her. Hold, oh Greeks ! said
 " she, ye who have laid waste my country, know I die voluntarily :
 " let no one approach me, I will deliver myself to the fatal stroke.
 " In the name of the Gods I conjure you suffer me to die free : I
 " am a queen, and should blush to appear in the infernal regions
 " as a slave. Amazement seized the whole assembly ; and Aga-
 memnon himself commanded them to let go their hold of Po-
 lyxena. She heard him ; and finding herself at liberty, she tore
 aside her robe, and baring her bosom, addressed these words to
 the son of Achilles ; words capable of softening rocks : Young
 prince behold my bosom, and my head, chuse where to strike ; I
 am ready. The son of Achilles astonished, lost in grief and pity,
 knew not what to do : he turned his eyes from that affecting ob-
 ject, he paused, he hesitated, he struck precipitately ; a rivulet of
 blood flowed from the wound."

" Elle tombe, & tombant range ses vêtemens,
 " Dernier trait de pudeur en ces derniers momens."

These two verses of Fontaine, which express the death of Thisbe, are the most faithful translation that can be given of the following passage of Euripides. Talthybius adds, that the whole assembly, filled with admiration of Polyxena, and compassion for her fate, began immediately to erect a pile for her, and to make in concert presents for the funeral pomp. This circumstance seems to lessen the horror which had seized Hecuba at the relation of her daughter's death : she even pronounces a moral speech upon those noble sentiments, which adversity itself cannot banish. Was
 " it to birth ? says she ; was it to education, that she owed that ele-
 " vated mind ?" She afterwards perceives that she moralizes un-
 seasonably, and she is in the right : but the Greeks were exces-
 sively fond of moral speeches ; they required them every where.
 " Go, says Hecuba to Talthybius, and tell the Greeks to remove
 " the croud from the body of the victim." She also orders one of
her

her women to bring water from the sea, to wash the body of Polyxena; and as the last rites were of infinite consequence among the ancients, she considers how she may pay them to her daughter with some degree of decency; and where she shall procure the rest of those funeral gifts, which, according to custom, were to be placed in the tomb. She resolves to intreat the Trojan ladies, her companions in captivity, to give her some of the gold, jewels, and rich habits which they had saved from the rapacious conquerors. This gives occasion for some melancholy reflections upon her former opulence and her present indigence; but as she is in a humour for moralizing, she concludes that honours and riches are but vanity; and that they only are truly happy who are least affected by the reverses of fortune. The Chorus continue the moral in three Stanzas.

A C T IV.

The woman who had been sent by Hecuba to the sea-side returns to acquaint her with new misfortunes. Hecuba comes out of her apartment; and the woman who brings a dead body veiled, as soon as she appears, calls her the most wretched of mortals. Hecuba supposes that the Greeks have sent her the body of Polyxena, and this mistake causes a very interesting suspension. Being told that it is not Polyxena, "Is it Cassandra then?" says the queen, "No," replies her woman; and instantly discovering the body, Hecuba knows it to be that of her son Polydore. Her grief no longer knows any bounds; it rises to madness. The measure also of the verses is changed, and it is very probable that the remainder of this scene was partly sung, or at least accompanied with musical instruments, to animate the actors; as we find done in many parts of the Greek tragedies, where their scenes when full of passion are intermixed with Strophies, as well as the Interludes of each act.

The attendant tells her that she found the body of Polydore upon the sea-shore, whither it had been cast by the waves. Hecuba then remembers the dream she had had the preceding night; and no longer doubts but it is Polymestor that murdered her son, to possess the treasures of Troy. The Chorus take part in this scene; but, upon the approach of Agamemnon, they are silent.

This monarch comes to intreat Hecuba to bury Polyxena as soon as possible. This duty belonged to the mother, or the nearest relation of the deceased. Agamemnon turning aside, perceives the dead body, which by the habit, he knows to be a Trojan. Hecuba,

at

at a little distance, deliberates whether she shall cast herself at Agamemnon's feet, to conjure him to revenge her on Polymestor: tho' some remains of the haughty spirit of a queen, together with the fear of being denied, occasions her irresolution: but her eager desire of vengeance, her tenderness for her child so inhumanly massacred, and her confidence in the generosity of a prince prevails, and she prostrates herself at the feet of the king of Mycena. "What is it thou requestest? says he, liberty? 'tis granted." "No, " answers Hecuba, captivity will be welcome to me, although it "should last as long as my life, provided I am revenged: thou "seest this body, it is my son." Here she relates the history of Polydore, and the treachery of Polymestor; and the only favour she implores of him is, that he will assist her in taking vengeance on this perfidious prince, who, to gratify his avarice, had violated the most sacred rights of hospitality and friendship. Agamemnon seems irresolute: "Thou wilt not grant my request, says she. Ah, "unfortunate queen, thy supplications are thrown away, and thy "vengeance is lost!" She adds also one of those sentences of which the Greeks were so fond; and which are so carefully observed by the commentators. "Alas! why are we so solicitous to cultivate "so many other arts, and yet neglect to use our utmost endeavours "to acquire the art of obtaining what we wish by the force of "persuasion?" It is true, that to this sentence, which is not in our taste, Hecuba employs all that nature can suggest most passionate and most tender, to move the heart of her conqueror. It is a captive, once a queen, who implores his compassion: a mother, whose children have been murdered with impunity: it is against a perfidious wretch that she intreats the justice of a generous enemy: men, Gods, and the pale carcase which she points to, all solicit for her. Troy, yet smoaking in ruins, rises to her remembrance, as in Racine's Andromache, who has borrowed these images, and imitated this passage:

"Seigneur, voyez l'état où vous me reduisez;
 "J'ai vu mon pere mort, & nos murs embrasez,
 "J'ai vu trancher les jours de ma famille entiere,
 "Et mon époux sanguin trainé sur la poussiere;
 "Son fils seul avec moi reservé pour le fers.
 "Mais que ne peut un fils! &c."

This whole scene of the French poet's is exactly the same with that of Euripides. Hecuba and Andromache are in the same perplexity

plexity; in the same melancholy situation: each with the same ardour endeavours to move the compassion of their conquerors. Hecuba, as a last and most painful effort, reminds Agamemnon that Cassandra is his captive, and his wife. It is by this last tender name, so affecting to both the mother and daughter, that the queen endeavours to prevail upon him. Her hands, her motions, her white hairs, the eloquent changes of her voice, all express the violence of her grief.

Agamemnon listens to her in silence, and with the air of one who is irresolute. Touched with a noble pity, he cannot refuse his aid against the impious Polymnestor; but policy forbids him to grant it. He would not be thought to have sacrificed Polymnestor to his passion for Cassandra. What will assembled Greece say of such a conduct? Polymnestor is his ally; Polydore was ranked among the number of his enemies. The army will not adopt the sentiments of a mother; and the interests of both are very different. In a word, he is unwilling to draw upon himself the indignation of the Greeks. "Alas!" cries Hecuba, no one is free
 "if kings are not so: mankind then are the slaves either of riches
 "or of rank. Humanity is suppress'd through a vain regard to the
 "ill judging multitude, or fantastic laws!" "Well, adds she, if thou
 "fearest nothing more than the censures of the Greeks, I will de-
 "liver thee from this fear: I will no longer intreat thee to af-
 "fist my vengeance: only keep my secret; and, if during the ex-
 "ecution of the scheme I have formed, any disturbance should
 "happen, stop it in its course, without appearing to act in my fa-
 "vour. As for the rest, leave to me the care of revenging myself
 "on Polymnestor." "Alas! and how wilt thou be able to revenge
 "thyself?" says Agamemnon. "By the hands of women, answers
 "the queen: only permit her (pointing to one among them) to
 "pass securely through the camp." She then orders her immedi-
 ately to go to Polymnestor, and intreat him to come to her on an
 affair which concerns their mutual interest. As for the funeral
 ceremony, she delays it till her vengeance is completed.

Agamemnon enters into her designs; and withdrawing, terminates the act, which is followed by an Interlude, sung by the Chorus: it turns upon the sacking of Troy, and the captivity of the Trojan women. The Stanzas are admirable, but would lose great part of their beauty by being separated.

A C T V.

Polymnestor, once the friend and ally of Priam, here assumes that character again, upon a supposition that his crime is buried in the waves with Polydore. He salutes Hecuba, laments her fate, and excuses himself for not seeing her during the three days she had been in his dominions; but affairs of state had kept him, he said, in a distant part of Thrace, and he came immediately to her upon meeting her messenger. The queen pretends to be ignorant of his treachery. "I ought to blush," said she, "to raise my eyes up to thee, being such as I now am, after what I have been." This shame is natural enough; but she adds another motive for it, which cannot but appear strange to our age: it is, that a woman is not permitted to look a man in the face. "What hast thou to say to me?" says the king. Hecuba gives him to understand that she has a secret of importance to confide to him and his children likewise. Polymnestor dismisses his attendants, and declares to her that he is ready to perform every kind office for his unfortunate friends. Hecuba begins by asking him if Polydore is alive. "Yes," answers the perjured prince; and in this at least thou art not "unfortunate."

HECUBA. Does he still remember his mother?

POLYMNESTOR. He would have come secretly to visit thee.

HECUBA. Are the treasures safe that were confided to thy care?

POLYMNESTOR. They are lodged securely in my palace.

HECUBA. Still continue to be the faithful guardian of them.

The conversation goes on in this manner: Polymnestor, curious to know the secret, would send away his children. "No," says Hecuba, "they must be present." She talks of other treasures, which she says are concealed under a black piece of marble in the ruins of Minerva's temple at Troy, and which Polymnestor's children ought to be informed of, in case their father should die. She also mentions some gold which she has saved in her flight; and which she was desirous of committing to his care. Thus tempted, Polymnestor enters the apartment where the Trojan women were expecting him; and the queen, as she introduces him, speaks in this ambiguous manner: "Enter, and do what is necessary to be done; after which, thou and thy children may return to the place where thou hast left my son."

The Chorus, who are acquainted with the snare that is laid for king, impatiently expect the issue of it, which is not long delayed; for a little

little time afterwards they hear him cry out, " Ah they are tearing " out my eyes ! " In effect, all the women throw themselves upon him with scissors or needles, and blind him ; while Hecuba murders the two children of her treacherous ally. This incident, which is not seen, is express in a very lively manner, and in few words, partly by the Chorus, and partly by the voices which are heard behind the scenes. Hecuba comes out, and at that instant the palægates are thrown open, and the bodies of Polymnestor's children are seen extended on the ground : he himself runs wildly about the stage, not knowing where to direct his steps, and in vain pursues the women who have deprived him of his sight. He calls the Greeks, the Atrides, and the whole army to his assistance. These are situations which cannot be expressed in our Alexandrian verses. The liberty the Greeks allowed themselves of changing the verification rendered this kind of natural actions extremely animated, and incapable of any tolerable translation.

Agamemnon enters hastily upon Polymnestor's cries : he pretends to be astonished at this noise, as if he was ignorant of the cause. Polymnestor, whom he finds in the same condition as Oedipus in Sophocles, says to him, " Thou seest to what I am reduced ; it is " Hecuba and her companions who have treated me thus." Agamemnon, continuing his dissimulation, calls for Hecuba, who presents herself with a fierce air, and triumphs in her vengeance. Polymnestor attempts to strike her, an action which would shock us greatly, although express in a manner truly tragic. Agamemnon, like a great monarch, whose authority extends even over his allies, restrains his fury, and takes upon himself the arbitration of so extraordinary a dispute : he insists upon hearing what arguments each has to urge, and of weighing them as a sovereign judge. Polymnestor consents, and speaks first. " Polydore, the last pledge of " Hecuba's marriage, is the cause of what has happened : when " Priam began to be apprehensive of the fate of Troy, he confided " the child to my care, and I have put him to death. I own the " fact; but hear my reasons, and then judge of the action : his " death was a stroke of policy alike advantageous to the Greeks " and to me. I was afraid that this child would one day collect " the scattered remains of Troy ; that he would raise anew that dan- " gerous kingdom from its ashes ; and that the enraged Greeks would " join in a second expedition, which might prove fatal to Thrace, " and at their return involve my dominions in the ruin of another " Troy raised by me. Hecuba was informed of the death of her son,

" and drew me into this snare, under the pretence of confiding to
 " me I know not what imaginary treasures. She prevailed upon
 " me to come with my children only into the most distant apart-
 " ment in this palace; and scarce was I seated, when I found my-
 " self surrounded with a crowd of women, who, seeming to admire
 " the magnificence of my robes and my javelin, disarmed me;
 " others took my children, and with dissembled caresses, led them
 " away from me, when suddenly the inhuman wretches drew
 " poniards from beneath their garments, and massacred my chil-
 " dren before my eyes. Those who till then had continued to
 " amuse me, seized my feet and hands, and others held me fast by
 " my hair to prevent me from succouring my children. Constrained
 " to yield to numbers, I became myself the object of their barba-
 " rous rage. They pierced my eyes with needles; and having thus
 " deprived me of sight, fled immediately. I pursued them, and
 " wild with grief and rage, I broke, I overthrew every thing that
 " opposed me, but I could not reach them. It is for my attachment to
 " thy interest and for having murdered thy enemy, that these mis-
 " ries, these horrors, have fallen upon me." He concludes with cursing
 all women, almost in the same manner as *Sganarelle. " Yes, cries
 " he, may all the imprecations that have or will be made, fall on this
 " sex; nor earth nor sea have ever produced any thing so detest-
 " able." The strangest part is, that the Chorus composed of wo-
 men; treat this flight of a madman with seriousness; saying that it
 would be unjust to believe what his rage suggests against all wo-
 men; and that if there are many wicked, there are also some virtuous.
 It is Euripides who speaks, a poet (as has been already
 observed, and as we shall find more and more) who in his works
 is as unfavourable to the sex as Racine his constant imitator affects
 to be polite.

Hecuba begins her defence by a sentence upon eloquence; she
 thinks it shameful that men should make an art of it, to serve the
 purposes of injustice and cruelty. Then turning towards Poly-
 nestor, .. " How hast thou the confidence, says she, to assert that it
 " was for the interest of Agamemnon and the Greeks that thou
 " murderedst my son? No no, the Greeks cannot have any real con-
 " nexion with barbarians: + But what favour dost thou hope for

* Moliere's School of husbands, scene the on to some breach of faith committed by
 last. the barbarians in alliance with the Greeks,
 † This stroke was doubtless an allusi- during the Peloponnesian war.

“ from them? The ties of blood, or the desire of their alliance have
“ prevailed with thee to commit this crime, or perhaps thou fear-
“ est their vengeance. Alas! whom dost thou think to persuade
“ by such pretences? Confess the truth; it was thy avarice that
“ robbed me of my child: if it was Agamemnon’s interest that di-
“ rected thy cruelty, why delay this sacrifice so long? why didst
“ thou not murder Polydore? or why rather didst thou not deliver
“ him up to the Greeks, while Troy still subsisted, while Priam
“ yet lived, and while the lance of Hector was still formidable?
“ Had this been thy motive, wouldest thou have waited till Troy was
“ reduced to ashes, before thou didst sacrifice a child entrusted to thee
“ upon the faith of hospitality? Let us remove the veil with which
“ thou endeavourest to hide the foulness of thy crime. Thou art
“ the friend of the Greeks, thou sayst! Well, be it so, the gold then
“ which thou acknowledgest does not belong thee, ought to be
“ distributed amongst the Greeks, exhausted with the toils of war,
“ and far from their native country: but thou, instead of sharing it
“ with them, hast kept it concealed in thy palace. How glorious
“ would it have been for thee to have restored me my son, pre-
“ served by thy friendly cares, and at a time when real friends
“ are distinguished by a fidelity independent of fortune! If thou,
“ in thy turn, shouldst have experienced adversity, in Polydore, made
“ happy by thy means, thou wouldest have found a support. He would
“ always have been a resource for thee; a treasure more valuable
“ than those by which thou hast suffered thyself to be seduced.
“ Miserable wretch! to what have they reduced thee? Thou art
“ disappointed in thy hope of gaining the friendship of Agamem-
“ non; and with the treasures which thou usurpest, thou hast lost
“ thy children and the light of day. As for thou, oh Agamemnon!
“ if thou supportest Polymnestor, thou wilt support a guilty wretch
“ who has violated public faith, and trampled upon the most
“ sacred laws; and thou wilt be accounted a defender of crimes
“ and such as commit them.”

After a reflection made by the Chorus upon the force of truth, which is alone the sinew of eloquence, Agamemnon speaks like a judge, and with great dignity decides against Polymnestor, whose artifice he has discovered. Thus the vengeance of Hecuba is authorised, and guilt justly punished. Polymnestor confounded, utters imprecations against Hecuba and Agamemnon. To the former he foretels that she will be transformed into a mad bitch, and thrown into the sea: the fable justifies this prediction. To the latter,

latter, that Cassandra will be murdered by Clytemnestra; and that his barbarous wife will not spare even him. This prophecy was likewise fulfilled. The superstition of the ancients made them consider these sort of curses pronounced by the unhappy as so many dreadful presages; therefore Agamemnon, although he affects to despise them, causes Polymnestor to be carried off, and confines him in a desert island. Mean time, a favourable wind rises; the fleet prepares to sail out of the port, and the tragedy concludes.

Erasmus has translated this piece, which he esteemed as one of the finest composed by Euripides, into Latin verse; and Lodovico Dolce has translated it into Italian with so great exactness, as even to imitate the different measures of the verses in the original. As neither of them have made any alterations in it, we shall say nothing more of their versions here. The Italian edition was printed at Venice in the year 1566. Neither is it necessary to make any observations upon the duplicity of action, which is visible; nor on those passages which evidently shock our manners. The tragic eminent in this composition effaces all this in the minds of those who are not prejudiced against the ancients; but I much doubt whether it could support itself in a regular and entire translation.

O R E S T E S:

A

TRAGEDY BY EURIPIDES.

THE subject is explained in the Prologue. The scene is laid in Argos, in the vestibule of Agamemnon's palace. The persons of the drama are Electra, a messenger, Orestes, Apollo, Helena, a Chorus of Grecian women, a Phrygian, Tyndaras, Pylades, Hermione, and Menelaus.

A C T I.

Electra appears at the foot of a couch, where Orestes lies asleep : she passes through the series of evils that have successively overwhelmed the house of Pelops : she goes back to the origin of these miseries, and sums up these illustrious but unfortunate princes from Tantalus, who is at the head of them, down to Orestes. Tantalus, in the infernal regions, is condemned to roll incessantly an enormous stone from the bottom of a hill to the top. Pelops cut in pieces, and his limbs served up to the Gods at a feast, had his shoulder eat by Ceres. Atreus and Thyestis, his sons, made the sun start back with horror at the dire effects of their quarrel. Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus, seemed to inherit their father's misfortunes. Marriage was the ruin of them both. The former was the husband and the victim of Clytemnestra, who inhumanly massacred him on his return from the Trojan expedition ; and the latter unhappily saw himself united to Helen, that common fury of Troy and Greece. Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, killed his mother to revenge his father's death, and in obedience to the commands of Apollo. " Myself, continues Electra, " was an accomplice in this crime, together with Pylades. The
,, said

" sad condition to which Orestes is reduced is the consequence of
" our fatal vengeance. Fixed to this bed of sorrows, he consumes
" away with remorse and shame: he refuses to take any nourish-
" ment: the furies scarce give him a moment's respite; and in every
" short interval of madness, he resigns himself to tears and lamenta-
" tions. Thus has he languished for six days, since the dreadful deed
" was executed." The dramatic action therefore begins on the
seventh day after Clytemnestra's death; and to complete the mis-
eries of Orestes and Electra, it is on this day that they were to be
judged by the Argives, who will doubtless condemn them to death
as parricides. Electra's only hope is in Menelaus, who was lately re-
turned from the expedition against Troy, and was expected that
day at Argos. " Menelaus, says Electra has sent Helen before
" him, but secretly, and in the night, that she might not be seen
" by the Greeks, who would certainly have punished her for the
" calamities she has brought upon Greece." Helen, we find, is
already in Argos, with her daughter Hermione. This is all which
precedes the action. Euripides, in this prologue, has not anticipa-
ted any of the events, as he has done in his tragedy of Hecuba: he
has only brought the audience to the point where they ought to
be, in order to understand the subject; therefore this scene is ex-
cusable, and may even be allowed to be beautiful.

Helen makes the second. As she is just arrived from Troy, she is
supposed to be partly ignorant of the misfortunes of Agamemnon
and his family; therefore she begins her enquiry by asking Elec-
tra how she and her brother had dared to lay their impious hands
upon a mother? However she softens their crime by attributing it
to Apollo, by whose oracles they had been influenced; and it is
for this reason that she conceives herself permitted to speak to her
niece, notwithstanding a sort of excommunication which both the
brother and sister had incurred, as has already been explained in
the Eumenides of Eschylus. Helen weeps for Clytemnestra, as for a
sister whom she tenderly loved. " What answer wouldest thou have
" me make thee? says Electra; thou feest the miserable condition
" to which the family of Agamemnon is reduced. I who pass the
" days and nights in tears, with this dear corps, (for can Orestes
" be said to live, loaded as he is with woes) I cannot reproach him
" for what he has done. Oh happy Helen! happy Menelaus!
" what miserable wretches are you come to?" Helen pities them, but
with an artificial air; and then makes a request to Electra, which is
only a snare for her. It is to carry libations and an offering of her
hair

to the tomb of Clytemnestra. Electra begs she will dispense with her from executing this commission, because she cannot quit her wretched brother for a moment: she exhorts her aunt to carry these gifts herself to her sister's tomb; and, piqued at her requiring her to perform this ceremony to Clytemnestra, who had treated her so cruelly, she herself covertly mortifies Helena, who durst not appear before the Argives. This is an artifice which the women play one upon another; for Helena was not ignorant of the part Electra had had in the murder of Clytemnestra. It was therefore to reproach her that she requested her to go and offer libations at the tomb of a mother who had been her enemy. This short dialogue, although natural enough, is yet beneath the dignity of tragedy.

Helena resolves to send her daughter Hermione with the libations she has prepared, and calls her for that purpose: while she is giving her directions, Electra observes aside, that beauty is a pernicious gift when it is not joined with virtue. "Behold this princess," says she, her hair is cut off; but this is no disadvantage to her: years have not impaired her charms, or changed her heart. "Unhappy Helen, by thee Orestes and all Greece are ruined." Or perhaps, for the sense is equivocal, her words may be rendered thus: "Helen maintains her character; with what care has she cut off her hair, that she might not spoil its beauty: years have not lessened her vanity, &c."

The Chorus now arrive, composed of a number of young Argive virgins, who come to console Electra. The princess is afraid that they will waken Orestes by their hasty entrance; and therefore bids them eagerly, but with great gentleness, to tread softly. The virgins repeat the same caution one to another, as they enter the apartment of the sick prince. This is repeated in such a manner, and played over so often in different forms, that it gives the theatrical dialogue a simplicity too near to folly. The Chorus enquire in whispers after the health of Orestes: they pity the brother and sister. Electra enters into a conversation with them; and from time to time begs them to be silent, so tender and anxious are her cares. Orestes moves in his bed; the princess chides the Chorus for having disturbed him: he sleeps again, and they continue to converse, and to lament the sad condition to which Orestes is reduced. In a word, this scene is nature itself: such as Euripides loved to represent on the theatre, and such as the Athenians required.

The Chorus, surprised at Orestes's sleeping so long and so quietly, begin to be apprehensive that he is dead. Electra approaches his bed-side: he awakes. "Oh sleep! cries he, thou who suspendest " my torments, and with thy gentle fetters bindest up my senses; " how seasonably didst thou come to my relief. Sweet oblivion of our " woes, how welcome art thou to the unhappy! Where am I now? " and how have I been brought hither? In my frenzy I have lost " all remembrance of it."

ELECTRA. My dear Orestes, what joy has thy peaceful slumber given me! suffer me to smooth these coverings, and to raise thy head.

Orestes accepts these little offices. He even intreats his sister to wipe away the foam from his lips, and to remove the scattered hairs that hang over his eye-lids: he discovers all the uneasy restlessness of a sick person; and his sister sooths him in the same manner as Phedra's confidant does her disordered * mistress. That scene we may remember is in the same character with this. Electra takes advantage of her brother's interval of reason to inform him that Helen is arrived, and that Menelaus is soon expected. Hereupon Orestes rises, and says, "Menelaus would be happier if " he had returned without her; by bringing back his wife, he has " loaded himself with a heavy burthen." Here Euripides departs a little from the dignity of tragedy, as well as in many other sentences against women; but this poet never lost any occasion of introducing them.

A moment afterwards Orestes is seized with his usual frenzy. "Ah, my dear brother, cries Electra, thy eyes are inflamed! what " sudden fury seizes thee, after so short an interval?"

ORESTES. + Oh mother! no longer arm these daughters of hell against me; hence with these horrid serpents. Ah! there they are; I see them grinning round me.

ELEC-

* Hippolitus of Euripides, Vol. II. Act 1. Sc. 6. p. 149.

+ You cannot be ignorant, says Longinus in his treatise on the Sublime, Sect. 15. translated by the Rev. Mr Smith, that rhetorical and poetical images have a different intent. The design of a poetical image is surprize, that of a rhetorical is perspicuity. However, to move and strike the imagination is a design common to both.

Pity thy offspring, mother, nor provoke
Those vengeful furies to torment thy son.
What horrid sights! how glare their bloody eyes!
How twisting snakes curl round their venom'd heads!
In deadly wrath the hissing monsters rise,
Forward they spring, dart out, and leap around me.

And again,

Alas!—she'll kill me!—whither shall I fly?

The

ELECTRA. Oh hold! be calm my dearest brother; thou seest none of these frightful spectres which thou believest thou seest.

ORESTES. Oh great Apollo! these monsters, these gorgons, these infernal priestesses seek my life.

ELECTRA, *holding him*. I will not quit thee, and at least I shall be able to prevent the consequences of these violent emotions.

ORESTES. Ah thou fury, leave me in quiet! wouldst thou drag me to Tartarus?

ELECTRA. Oh Gods! what can I do against the Demon that torments him?

ORESTES. Bring me my bow and arrows, the precious gifts of Apollo, that I may deliver myself from their fierce Eumenides, who will not suffer me to rest one moment.

ELECTRA. Dost thou imagine that a mortal can wound Divinities?

ORESTES. Yes; I will pierce them instantly, unless they leave me. Heardst thou the sound of my arrows which cut the air? dost thou behold them? hence, hence ye gloomy Goddesses, be gone, fly; accuse Apollo only. Oh, my strength forsakes me! I breathe

The poet here actually saw the furies with the eyes of his imagination, and has compelled his audience to see what he beheld himself. Euripides therefore has laboured very much in his tragedies to describe the two passions of madness and love, and has succeeded much better in these, than (if I am not mistaken) in any other.

Sometimes indeed he boldly aims at images of different kinds. For tho' his genius was not naturally great, yet in many instances he even forced it up to the true spirit of tragedy; and that he may always rise where his subject demands it (to borrow an allusion from the poet.)

Lash'd by his tail his heaving sides incite
His courage, and provoke himself for fight.

The foregoing assertion is evident from that passage, where Sol delivers the reins of his chariot to Phaeton:

Drive on, but cautious shun the Libyan air;
That hot unmoisten'd region of the sky
Will drop thy chariot.—

And a little after.

Thence let the Pleiads point thy wary course.
Thus spoke the God. Th' impatient youth with haste
Snatches the reins, and vaults into the seat.
He starts; the couriers, whom the lashing whip
Excites, outstrip the winds, and whirl the car
High thro' the airy void. Behind, the fire,
Borne on his planetary steed, pursues
With eye intent, and warns him with his voice,
Drive there!—now here!—here! turn the chariot here!

Who would not say that the soul of the rider, that it shared as well in danger, as the poet mounted the chariot along with the rapidity of flight with the horses, &c.

* Toi qui dans enfers me veux precipiter.
Déesse, cesse enfin de me préfécuter.

with pain. Where am I going? how came I out of this bed? the storm at length is past. Alas, Electra, thou weepest! thou veilest thy face. Oh my loved sister! why art thou associated in my miseries? why must the frantic Orestes give thee so much disquiet? Ah, take not so great share in my calamities; but leave me to consume away with grief and remorse! It was I who committed the crime, thou wert only witness to it; but what do I say? Apollo only was to blame: he, by his seducing oracles, urged me to this guilt, and now he abandons me. Oh! if I had consulted the shade of my father, he would doubtless have dissuaded me from a deed useless to him, and so fatal to me. Hide not thy face, my dear Electra; wipe away thy tears; whatever are our misfortunes, do thou soften mine as I would thine. These mutual services become our friendship. But now retire, languish no longer thus without food; at least allow thyself a few moments sleep after so many nights of watching and anxiety. Well may thy life be dear to me; for alas! what would become of me if I lost thee? Shouldst thou be seized with a sickness in consequence of thy incessant care of me, I am undone: thou art my support, every one else abandons me.

ELECTRA. Talk not of what I suffer, my dearest brother; I will live and die with thee: should not I be wretched also if I lost thee? Alone, without relations, without friends, how could I endure life, deprived of thee? I will leave thee for a few moments, since thou desirest it; but I beseech thee remain still upon this bed: recal thy reason, banish these fatal ideas, and endeavour to relieve the pains of the mind as we do those of the body: the former are indeed the true diseases of mankind. [She retires]

Nature itself could not suggest expressions more tender and delicate: The Chorus terminate the act by Stanzas, conformable to the foregoing scene: they implore the Furies to spare an unhappy prince, and lament his misfortune with that Pindaric elevation which distinguishes the Greek Chorus in a manner not to be expressed. At length they perceive Menelaus with his train; and they congratulate him upon his return.

A C T II.

Menelaus considers his return as unfortunate, and with reason. He enters a palace where Agamemnon his brother had been massacred by his wife. This frightful news he had been informed of during his voyage, by Glaucus, the oracle of mariners. He had heard

heard from a fisherman, the fate of Clytemnestra. He desires to see Orestes, whom he left so young he says, that he does not expect to know him again.

The afflicted prince rises from his bed, and throws himself at the feet of Menelaus. He declares himself to be that Orestes, that criminal who nevertheless implores the protection of an uncle, and dares to hope for it. Menelaus starts back in astonishment; he thinks he beholds a ghost, so greatly is this young prince disfigured by his grief and his calamities. These he relates in an interrupted dialogue: he dwells particularly on his distress in being abandoned by every one, without support; and neglected even by Apollo, who had constrained him to become a parricide; his excommunication (if that term may be used); the hatred of the Argives, who were determined to put him to death as a criminal; the assembly which is to be held that very day in order to condemn him. He tells him that his father's enemies persecute him through policy and a thirst of vengeance; and that the citizens have taken the precaution to surround the palace, to hinder him from escaping the punishment to which he is destined. "Thou art, adds he, my only resource; fortune has been lavish of her blessings to thee, bestow some of them upon thy unhappy friends: share in their afflictions; and become a father to those who hold the place of children to thee. 'Tis now, 'tis in adversity, that true friendship ought to shew itself."

The Chorus give notice that Tyndarus appears in a mourning habit: Tyndarus is the father of Clytemnestra. Orestes trembles at his approach; gratitude heightens his remorse for the action he has committed. "I owe every thing to him, cries he; what care did he not take of me during my childhood! what tenderness have I not experienced from him and Leda! and oh what return have I made them! Where shall I hide myself from his sight? how can I meet his looks?" Tyndarus, who had been visiting his daughter's tomb, approaches. After the first civilities between him and Menelaus, he perceives Orestes. "That parricide, says he, that serpent fixes his poisonous looks upon me: what, Menelaus, darest thou speak to a criminal separated from the rest of mankind?" He then makes a formal harangue, to accuse Orestes. It favours a little of the old man; but the Greeks made their imitations of nature always exact: our taste is altered in this respect.

Tyndarus does not pretend to excuse the crime his daughter Clytemnestra has committed; on the contrary, he expresses the utmost abhorrence of it: "But was it for Orestes to revenge it? "He ought to have had recourse to the laws; he ought to have banished his mother, and submitted her sentence to the judges: "but he has revenged one crime by another more impious still. "Let us suppose, adds he, that a woman kills her husband, and a son kills his mother, is the grand-son to kill his father upon the same principle of vengeance? When would the crime of blood-shed have an end? It is for this that our ancestors condemned to exile him who had committed an involuntary murder; otherwise destruction would have been continued without end, by a constant succession of revenge."

Tyndarus, after this reasoning, thus pathetically addresses himself to Orestes: "How couldest thou behold unmoved a suppliant mother adjuring thee by that bosom which thou hadst sucked? "I who have not seen this action, weep at the bare idea of it." Tyndarus here speaks as the father of Clytemnestra; and it is this secret interest which influences him to deliver up his grand-son to death; and to declare to Menelaus, that if he opposes it, he will break off all friendship with him for ever.

The speech of Orestes is modest, yet full of energy. Confused at first, he bends his eyes to the ground: he fears to answer Tyndarus, and to recal melancholy ideas to the remembrance of a father already too miserable. He respects his white hairs: he dares not give Clytemnestra the name of mother; he calls her the daughter of Tyndarus; but at length he justifies himself by the same sort of reasoning, as we have seen in the Furies of Eschylus. "The father, "he says, is properly the author of birth, not the mother; therefore "he thought himself obliged in duty to his father to revenge his "murder by the death of her who had committed it: yet he acknowledges that he has been guilty of a crime; but he would "have this crime considered as necessary, as inevitable, as one which "filial piety, as well as Apollo, commanded." "Thou wouldest have "the Argives stone me, continues he; and for what? for rendering an important service to all Greece. For say, what miserable times should we see, if women should arrive at such a height of wickedness, as to murder their husbands, and yet hope to escape unpunished, by exciting the compassion of their children? "Thus secured from danger, they would make nothing of imbruting their hands in their husbands blood. My supposed crime has

"de-

" deprived them for ever of this resource. And yet, who is it I
 " have killed? a perfidious wife, who having violated her nuptial
 " faith, instead of piercing her own bosom, made her husband the
 " victim of her adultery. If there are Furies who revenge my mo-
 " ther's death upon me, would not others far more dreadful have
 " punished me for neglecting a murdered father?" Lastly Orestes
 pleads the express orders of Apollo. " It is Apollo, says he, whom
 " thou oughtest to judge and condemn; he only is guilty. Is not a
 " God sufficient to secure me; and who will hereafter escape death,
 " if I cannot be safe by such a protector?" The Chorus, who,
 as usual, slide in their word here to express the impression any dis-
 course makes upon the assembly, acknowledge that women are
 the cause of many calamities; but Tyndarus, instead of being con-
 vinced by the arguments Orestes urges, is but the more irritated,
 and departs with his train, fully determined to animate the city
 and the judges against Orestes and his sister.

Menelaus endeavours to detain him, and seems moved, or feigns
 to be so; for in his heart he is desirous of Orestes's death, that he
 may get possession of his crown and his dominions: but he goes
 about in a covert and artful manner. Orestes, who trembles to
 find that this only resource is likely to fail him, resumes his solici-
 tations. " Do for me, says he to him, what my father has done
 " for thee. It was for thy quarrel that he engaged in the Trojan
 " war: he exposed his life in it during ten years: it is not ten
 " years that I require of thee, but a single day; and a few kind of-
 " fices in favour of the son of thy brother and benefactor." This
 is the sense of his speech to Menelaus, which he concludes by
 throwing himself at his feet. " Imagine, says he, that my
 " cries have reached my father in the profound regions of Pluto's
 " kingdom; and that his shade hovers about thee to join my hum-
 " ble supplications."

The Chorus add their intreaties, and Menelaus answers at last,
 but like an artful and politic prince. " I am grieved for thy mis-
 " fortunes, says he, and I am willing to serve thee. This is a du-
 " ty to which I am bound by our nearness in blood: I would serve
 " thee at the expence of a battle, and even of my life: but how is
 " it possible? it is a favour I would implore of the Gods. I am
 " but lately delivered from a ruinous war; my army is exhausted;
 " I have scarce any friends remaining in whom I can confide. How
 " can I pretend to use force against such a city as Argos? I hope
 " to preserve thee by gentle methods; it would not be prudent to
 " un-

" undertake an impossible conquest. The rage of sedition is more difficult to be extinguished than a violent conflagration. If we yield with caution and judgment to this rage, it may possibly abate, and then we may seize a favourable opportunity of gaining over the multitude: for the blind many make a swift transition from anger to pity; and a politic prince is capable of turning both these passions to his own advantage. I will go therefore, and endeavour to soften Tyndarus and the people. The people is a vessel that must be steered with caution. I have not yet attempted to move the Argives with intreaties and supplications; but prudence requires that I should yield to time."

Orestes, through these studied excuses, penetrates into the design of his inhuman uncle, who abandons him in such an exigence. He gives him a look full of indignation, and suffers him to depart without answering him any otherwise than by a bitter scoff upon his weakness, which would not suffer him to fight in any other cause but a woman's; and a reproach of his treachery, which stilled in his heart every noble and generous sentiment. The despair to which Orestes is reduced by his uncle's cruel neglect is in some measure mitigated by the appearance of a man very different from Menelaus: this is Pylades, who arrives unexpectedly.

This scene is an interrupted dialogue, where each of the speakers pronounces his verse or his half verse. Pylades, astonished at what he had heard and seen of the commotion among the people, and the sentence of death which was soon to be pronounced against his friend, had flown with anxious haste to save him. Orestes informs him of the return and treachery of Menelaus. Pylades advises him to a speedy flight, but this is not practicable: the palace is surrounded with guards and spies. Pylades is also in the same unhappy situation: he is banished by his father Strophius, for having been an accomplice in the murder of Clytemnestra. Orestes grieves that he has rendered his friend miserable. This thought makes him forget his own misfortunes. " Mine affect me but little, says Pylades. Menelaus is not an example for me to follow."

Orestes displays all the tender anxiety of friendship: he seems no longer to fear for himself, but only for Pylades. The latter comforts him; and, after having weighed every thing, advises him to defend his cause himself before the assembly of the people. Pylades undertakes to attend him, to support him, and guard him from all danger. " Alas! when should I shew my friendship, says he, if not in so delicate a conjuncture?" Orestes is desirous of

of acquainting Electra with their design : his friend dissuades him from doing so, lest her tears and anxiety should prevail with him to lay aside an expedient which appeared to him the only one they could have recourse to in their present situation. Accordingly, the two friends depart together, intending to visit first the tomb of Agamemnon, but to avoid that of Clytemnestra. I have forgot to observe, that Orestes is, with great difficulty, prevailed upon to accept the generous offer of Pylades ; but he is at length forced to yield in this friendly contest.

The Chorus, to fill the interval after this act, recount the misfortunes of the family of the Atridæ; and paint the horror of Orestes's crime, who had been his mother's executioner. This is done expressly to keep up the fears of the audience, that Orestes will be condemned.

A C T III.

Electra, whose tender solicitude for her brother, would not allow her to enjoy many moments of repose, returns to seek him. The Chorus tell her that he is gone with Pylades to appear before the assembly. What a new subject of terror is this for her! a man comes in suddenly, and without giving her time to reflect upon the absence of Orestes, and the uncertainty of success, tells her abruptly, and with tears, that the assembly have pronounced sentence against her and her brother ; that they are both condemned to death ; and that they have no longer any resource or hope of safety.

This man, who had been always faithful to the interests of Agamemnon, gives a circumstantial account of what had passed in the assembly. Here follows his speech, which I have only abridged in some passages, without changing the turn and manner of it : “ I came “ into the city, says he, to get intelligence of the situation Orestes “ and thou wert in, for gratitude bound me to king Agamemnon. “ I saw the people hastening to the place of judgment : ” (he means an eminence where Danaus was judged by the Argives, and condemned to death* for having commanded his daughter to murder the sons of his brother Egyptus) “ I asked one of the citizens, “ continues he, on what account this assembly was held? is Argos

* This fable is very different from that of Eschylus, who supposes that Danaus and his daughter found an Asylum in Argos. (See the suppliants of Eschylus.) But the traditions of fabulous history were very contradictory, and the poets chose such as best suited their present purpose.

" alarmed with any sudden report of war? Look, answered he, " there is the person whom they are going to condemn to death. " I raised my eyes, I beheld, (oh heavens! what a spectacle was " this for me!) I beheld Orestes and Pylades; the former wasted " almost to a shadow with grief and pain; the latter supporting " him with the tenderness of a brother*. The assembly was " formed; the herald with a loud voice, said, do you absolve or " condemn the parricide Orestes? speak, determine. Talthybius " rose up first: this man who formerly was devoted to Agamem- " non, and had now joined the party of the most powerful magi- " strates, made a subtle speech, in which he took care to disoblige " neither side: he seemed willing to spare thy father's memory; " but he expressed himself in so ambiguous a manner, with regard to " Orestes, as gave great joy to the partizans of Egisthus. Men of " this character are always ready to take that side which fortune " favours. King Diomede spoke next: he was for sparing your " lives, and condemning you only to banishment. Hereupon the " voices were divided; some praised the proposal made by the king, " others blamed him for it. A citizen now rose up in his turn, " bold, seditious, but capable of influencing a whole people by his " eloquence. What a scourge are such geniuses to a state! He " insisted that both the brother and sister ought to be stoned. Tyn- " darus spoke after him, and pronounced against you. At length " another person appeared, his air was simple, and modest, but " such as spoke unshaken courage and uncorruptible integrity; a " good and honest citizen, of the number of those who form the " strength and happiness of a state, and, wisely attentive to their " own affairs, never engage in dangerous intrigues to disturb the " quiet of a city. He declared that Orestes merited a crown " for having revenged his father, and punished an impious mother; " whose pernicious example, if Orestes was punished for her death, " would henceforwards prevent men from leaving their families " to serve their country. His speech was applauded by all the " honest citizens, and no more orators appeared. At length Ores- " tes approached. Inhabitants of Argos, said he, it was to revenge " the murder of my father, and your king, that I killed Cly- " temnestra." Here are repeated the arguments Orestes had before made use of in his discourse to Menelaus; shewing the dreadful con- sequences of leaving unpunished a crime like that of Clytemnestra's.

* The whole of this narration appears to be an allegory upon the popular debates of the Athenian republic; but it would require

the penetrating wit of an Oedipus to make the application to times and facts.

The man continues his narration thus: "The speech of Orestes was applauded, but he was not able to move the people in his favour. The seditious orator turned the balance, and carried it against him. Scarce could the prince prevail with them to spare him the infamy of dying by the hands of executioners: he gave his word for thee and for himself, that thou wouldest this day execute the sentence passed on thee by thine own hands. Pylades and his friends weeping, lead him back, and thou wilt soon be hold him."

Electra bends her eyes to the ground, and afterwards abandons herself to tears and complaints, which make the Interlude. She laments the sad destiny of her ruined house, whose misfortunes, the past as well as present, rush all together on her mind, and she describes them with all the eloquence of excessive sorrow.

It ought to be observed, that Euripides, in the picture he has drawn of the Argive assembly, alludes to the Athenian Areopagus, and to the orators of his own time, whom he slightly touches in his way; and in particular, one Cleophon of Thrace, who is also mentioned by Aristophanes, in his *Frogs*. At least it is the opinion of the Scholiast, that Cleophon is painted in the character of the seditious orator. The Greeks were great speech-makers; therefore it is not surprising that Euripides should sometimes in his harangues affect to ridicule the eloquence of some Athenian orators; herein however, he offends against the majesty of tragedy, as in a scene of his *Electra*, where he criticizes Eschylus.

A C T IV.

Orestes returns, Electra weeps; she thinks she now beholds him for the last time. The brother tenderly endeavours to calm the grief of his sister. "Wound me not, says he, by this excessive sorrow; it is enough that the Argives have doomed us to die to-day." The prince's sorrow is great, but heroic; that of the princess is more tender and more violent, in which the difference of manners is exactly observed. "What, says she, are we to die this day, and dost thou forbid me to weep?" She begs that she may die by the hand of Orestes. "I am already polluted with a mother's blood, replies Orestes, there needs not this increase of guilt. Alas, resumes Electra! thy sword ought to render me this sad office, yet suffer me to give thee a last embrace." Orestes unwillingly gives way to grief for a few moments: he sighs; and Electra, assuming more courage, now wishes for nothing more

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than to die if it be possible by the same stroke that kills him; and to be laid in one tomb with her brother*.

Orestes, after observing that the treacherous Menelaus did not so much as appear at the assembly, calls up all his fortitude. "Let us die, says he, in a manner worthy the children of Agamemnon: we are now to give the Argives a proof of our resolution: follow my example, sister; and be thou, Pylades, a witness of our deaths; take care of our bodies, and lay them in our father's tomb. Farewel."

PYLADES. Stop one moment; thou injurest me Orestes. How canst thou suppose that I will survive thee?

ORESTES. Of what use is it to me, that my friend dies with me?

PYLADES. Alas! how can I live without thee?

ORESTES. Thou art not a parricide as I am.

PYLADES. No, but I was an accomplice in thy crime; and it is just that I should share the punishment of it.

ORESTES. No, live my Pylades, restore thy father his only son. Thou hast a sceptre, I am deprived of mine. Thou hast thy father's name to support, and immense riches wait thee. 'Tis true: thou losest Electra, whom I had destined for thy bride: but mayst thou be blest in a more fortunate marriage. All hope of a farther alliance between us is now no more. Adieu, my dearest friend! live and enjoy that happiness which is denied to Electra and to me.

PYLADES. May I be cut off from earth and air, if to save my own life I basely abandon thee. I contributed to thy crime; nay I was the author of it: it is just that I should die with thee and with Electra, whom I consider as my wife. Alas! what shall I say in my own defence, when I return to Phocis? I, who was the friend of you both, yet could forsake you when I saw you miserable. No, my honour and my fame is too dear to me, to suffer me to be guilty of such a baseness: but since we are determined to die, let us first take vengeance on Menelaus.

Here we have a friendly contest between Orestes and Pylades, of the same kind with that in the Iphigenia in Tauris. What follows seems at first view to be inconsistent with the manners of virtuous persons; for Pylades proposes a scheme of revenge which is altogether shocking. He advises Orestes to murder Helen;

* Orestes and his sister are here in the same situation as Petus and Arria. See Vol. I. and

and Orestes resolves upon it. Even the manner in which they concert their conspiracy has something cowardly in it. Yet they are in some degree excusable, when we consider that Helen has a numerous train of attendants, and the princes were resolved that their victim should not escape them. As for the disgrace they should incur by the murder of a woman, Pylades wipes his off in the same manner as Æneas in Virgil, when he relates his adventures to Dido.

“ Namque et si nullum memorabile nomen
 “ Fœmineâ in pœnâ est, nec habet victoria laudem.
 “ Extinxisse nefas tamen, & sumpsisse merentes
 “ Laudabor pœnas.”

—For tho' the victor gain,
 No fame, no triumph for a woman slain;
 Yet if by just revenge the traitress bleed,
 The world consenting, will applaud the deed.
 To my own vengeance I devote her head,
 And the great spirits of our heroes dead. Pitt.

Pylades, upon the same principle, proposes this action to Orestes, as one so much the more justifiable, in that Helen is alike detested by the Trojans and the Greeks.

“ Trojæ & patriæ communis Erynnis.”

The common plague! by Troy and Greece abhorred.

Already in thought she grasps the sceptre of Orestes, and Ménélaus will enjoy it; but the interest of all Greece is still a more powerful motive than their own private vengeance. It was their duty to deliver their country from a monster, to revenge her injuries, and to pacify the manes of those who fell at the siege of Troy. “ The Greeks, continues Pylades, will bless us, and change the odious names of parricides and murderers into the glorious title of the revengers of the state.”

Such are the arguments urged by this prince; and to him they appear so conclusive, that he reserves to himself the honour of giving her the first wound. “ If our victim should escape us, adds he, let us burn this palace, and die together in its ashes. If either of our schemes succeed, we shall die nobly, or perhaps escape with honour.”

The Chorus through hatred to Helen, enter into their conspiracy. “ Ah! cries Orestes, there is nothing that can be compared

“ with

" with a true and constant friend: treasures and sceptres are poor
 " to this valuable possession. Thou shardest my former dangers;
 " thou associatedst thyself in my misfortunes; is my life again to be
 " exposed? again I behold thee at my side." He then animates
 himself to pursue a revenge worthy, he says, of Agamemnon, and
 of a son who did not degenerate from him.

Electra, after hearing what both the princes had to propose, advises them to sacrifice the daughter as well as the mother to their revenge; or rather to keep Hermione, whom she expected immediately from Clytemnestra's tomb, as an hostage; to the end that if Menelaus, when he found Helen murdered, should attempt to revenge her death, they might restrain him, by threatening to make his daughter suffer the same fate; and thus treat with him sword in hand. Orestes, charmed with this proposal, laments the approaching death of Electra, whose fortitude and courage merit a better fate than that to which she is doomed. " My dear Pylades, adds he, " what a wife dost thou lose!" All this is beautifully contrived, to introduce the catastrophe, as we shall see by what follows.

The two princes and the princess, by mutually encouraging one another, begin to recover their spirits, and to perceive a ray of hope. They regulate their several posts, as in a conspiracy. Electra is to wait for the return of Hermione at the palace-gate, and give the signal for the enterprize to be begun in case of any alarm. Orestes and Pylades prepare to enter the palace, to execute their design when necessary; and they conclude this scene with a solemn and majestic invocation of Agamemnon's shade, which I shall give the reader.

ORESTES. Oh father, who now dwellest in the regions of eternal night, know it is thy son who calls upon thee! Oh come to our assistance! It is for thy sake that I have precipitated myself into this excess of misery: it was for having revenged thee that I am betrayed, and abandoned by thy brother. I would punish him by sacrificing his perfidious wife: give success to a design so just and lawful.

ELECTRA. Oh father! if in thy tomb thou hearest the cries of thy unhappy children, who are upon the point of dying in thy cause, haste to their assistance.

PYLADES. Reject not my prayers, oh Agamemnon! thou who wert by blood united to my father, save thy children.

ORESTES. I killed a mother.

PYLADES. I presented the poniard.

ELECTRA. I led the victim into the snare.

ORESTES. Oh my father, this was done to revenge thee!

ELECTRA. And to perform our duty.

PYLADES. Oh! therefore hear our supplications, august shade of Agamemnon, and save thy blood.

ORESTES. I offer thee a libation of my tears.

ELECTRA. My sighs and groans I offer.

PYLADES. Enough. It is now time to act; if the prayers of mortals pierce the earth, and reach the dead, Agamemnon must hear ours. And thou, great Jupiter, the author of my race, the revenger of injustice, afford thy aid to her, to him, to me, three friends engaged in the same cause! let this event be equal to them all, safety or death.

The two princes immediately enter the palace. As for Electra, she continues at her post with the Chorus, whom she places at different passages to observe who goes in or comes out of the palace; and whether any suspected person is near. These are minute circumstances of a conspiracy, which form a theatrical action wholly in the manner of the Greeks, but full of beauties. Those terrors so natural to the sex, especially on the execution of an important enterprize, which is nothing less than a revolution of state, are here displayed in the most lively manner. Electra separates the ladies of her little court, and posts them at all the avenues. One of them perceives a man coming; Electra gives all for lost; the lady removes all her fears. The princess sends to another place to see if all be quiet, and she is told that no person is to be seen. She then goes to the palace gate, and exhorts the princes to dispatch Helen. "They hear me not, resumes she: ah how wretched am I! has "her charms blunted their poniards?"

Electra again visits each post; she fears lest some of the Argives should hasten to the assistance of Helen. In such a situation every thing is suspected, every thing inspires terror. " 'Tis now, says she, "that we must cast our eyes on all sides." La Fontaine makes the lark in his fable say the same thing*.

"Rien ne nous presse encore de changer de résidence,

"Mais c'est demain qu'il faut de bon écouter."

Helen is now heard to cry out for help. The Chorus offer up prayers for Orestes: Helen cries out again, and Electra ani-

* The Lark and her Young.

mates

mates the princes to strike as in that tragedy of Sophocles which is called Electra†. The Argive ladies hear a noise on one side; it is Hermione returning from the tomb. The sister of Orestes orders her friends to appear composed, that Hermione may entertain no suspicion of any danger. The young princess declares that she is terrified at the cries and the noise she has just heard in the palace. "Alas, replies Electra, these cries "suit with our miserable state." She then informs her of the sentence which had been pronounced by the assembly of the people against her brother and herself; and deceiving her by a false confidence, makes her believe that Orestes was imploring Helen to interest herself in their favour, and to deliver them from death. Hermione, being the dupe of this artifice, promises to employ her good offices in their behalf, and goes into the palace, where she is immediately secured by the princes, as had before been agreed upon. Electra then desires the Chorus to make a noise, that what passes in the palace may not be heard without, and enters herself to wait the issue of the conspiracy.

At that instant a Phrygian slave of Helen's comes out in an agony of fear; and, not knowing where to conceal himself from the death that awaits him, utters dreadful cries. When he is a little recovered, the Chorus prevail upon him to give them an account of what had happened: he tells them that Orestes and Pylades approached Helen in the manner of suppliants; and that the Phrygian slaves apprehending some treachery, or at least seeming doubtful what to think, suddenly placed themselves about the queen; that he himself was employed in fanning her, (a part of Phrygian luxury, often mentioned by the poets) she held the distaff in her hand, and was employed in spinning purple vests, which she destined as an offering to the shade of Clytemnestra: that Orestes intreated her to pass forwards to the ancient altar of Pelops, and hear what he had to say to her; and as soon as she complied with his request, not suspecting her fate, Pylades under various pretences removed that numerous train of Phrygian slaves, and locked them up in several apartments. When they had reached the altar, the two Grecian princes drew their poniards, which they had concealed under their robes, speaking thus to Helen: "Thou must die, and it is to the "treachery of thy husband that thou owest thy death; in revenge "for his having betrayed the son of his brother. The queen,

* The Electra of Sophocles, Vol. I. Act V. Sc. II.

"con-

" continues the slave, cried out; she attempted to fly, but Orestes held her fast by the hair, and bending down her head upon her shoulder, was ready to strike, when the slaves breaking open the doors, came in crouds to her assistance, arming themselves with the first weapons they could lay hold of: but Pylades advancing fiercely towards them, like the warrior Ajax, or Hector, such as I have seen him in Priam's palace, it now appeared plainly how greatly we are inferior to the Greeks in valour." Here he describes in few words, the combat which ensued, and in which many of the slaves were either slain or wounded. Hermione, adds he, entered and threw herself into the arms of her mother. The two princes forced her from thence; and as they returned to Helen to sacrifice her, this queen, the daughter of Jupiter and Leda, suddenly vanished out of sight. The slave concludes his relation with this circumstance; and here ends the fourth act, unless we will suppose that the fifth act begins with the entrance of this Phrygian, which indeed would appear more natural.

A C T V.

Orestes comes out with his sword in his hand; he is apprehensive that the eunuch will alarm the people by his cries: the trembling wretch conjures him to spare his life, which Orestes promises, upon condition that he will swear his attempt against Helen was just. The slave agrees to every thing to preserve himself; and Orestes sends him back to the palace. This scene partakes a little of the nature of comedy: it is full of satirical strokes against the Phrygians, in complaisance to the Greeks; and there are some levelled at the philosophers of the times: as for example, when Orestes says to the eunuch, "Thou art a slave, and yet thou art afraid of death, which will free thee from all thy miseries!" A stoical sentiment. The eunuch tells him that life is sweet even to slaves. The prince enters the palace again, and the second scene is only an artifice of the Chorus, who make several movements on the stage, as usual, apparently to prevent the enterprize from being discovered without; but in a few moments a smoke is seen within the palace, where the conspirators are preparing materials to set it in flames. The Chorus perceive Menelaus coming, who has been in part informed of what had happened: he endeavours to force his way into the palace, but Orestes shews himself upon a balcony, and refuses him entrance. He points his sword at the breast of Hermione, and already the flames begin to appear. The prince

threatens Menelaus to kill his daughter before his eyes, and to burn the palace, if instead of making any attempt to enter by force, he does not instantly obtain a revocation of the sentence which the people had pronounced against him and his sister. Menelaus, divided between rage and fear, neither dares to grant or to refuse what is demanded of him.* Orestes insists upon his immediate compliance; but upon Menelaus's delay, who calls out for assistance, he bids Electra and Pylades set fire to the palace.

It now becomes necessary for Apollo to descend from heaven to unravel the plot: he declares that he had preserved Helen from the designed vengeance of Orestes; he shews her to Menelaus in glory; he stays the arm of Orestes, and commands him to espouse Hermione, whom he was upon the point of sacrificing; and to purify him from the stain he had contracted, Apollo imposes upon him a year's banishment, according to the custom of the Greeks. He requires that he should afterwards go to Athens, and submit to the judgment of the Areopagus, as Eschylus has described it in his Furies; and lastly, this God takes upon himself the government of the kingdom of Argos, till Orestes returns to reign in peace and glory.. Electra is given in marriage to Pylades; and the tragedy concludes, not only with solemn thanks to the Gods, but also with a sincere reconciliation among the princes.

It is easy to perceive that this act and this unravelment are not the most beautiful parts of this tragedy, in which there are likewise some strokes of a cast too low; not to say comick, at least according to our manner of thinking. However, it obtained the prize, as the last words of the Chorus give us to understand; and if we attend to the poet's art in the theatrical action, and the nice conduct of the passions, we must allow that it merited this honour.

* Aristotle, in the 16th chapter of his poeticks, condemns the manners of Menelaus in this piece of Euripides. Dacier explains this criticism thus: Menelaus, he says, acts inconsistent with his character, and does not hold to what he seemed to promise; when after having taken a resolution agreeable to reason and humanity, he changes it through fear and policy; and abandons his nephew. I cannot easily ad-

mit this to be the meaning of Aristotle, who says no more than this: "We offend "against the goodness of manners when "they are not necessary; such are the man- "ners of Menelaus in the Orestes of Euri- "pides." It is more probable that Aristotle blames Euripides for having made Menelaus too bad an uncle; for so he appears throughout the whole piece, and is therefore always inconsistent.

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T R A G E D Y O F E U R I P I D E S.

THIS tragedy is a real Thebaid, although the title does not seem to promise it. The pieces of Seneca and Racine upon the same subject are only shadows of it; so much does this tragedy of Euripides abound in descriptions of war, and in shining sentiments.

The prologue to this piece, as well as that of Orestes, explains part of the subject; or rather acquaints the audience with what preceded the action of the Drama. It is Jocasta, queen of Thebes, who speaks. The other persons are, an old Equerry, Antigone, the daughter of Jocasta; the Chorus, composed of Phenician virgins; Polynices and Eteocles, sons of Jocasta; Creon, the queen's brother; Menelaus, the son of Creon; Tiresias, a prophet; two messengers; and Oedipus, the son and husband of Jocasta.

A C T I.

The queen comes to repeat her misfortunes to the sun, according to a custom among the Greeks, which has been already observed in the Electra of Sophocles and elsewhere. She dates her miseries from Cadmus, the son of Agenor, the founder of the family of Laius. Cadmus fixed his residence in the Theban country; and by his wife Hermione, the daughter of Venus, he had a son named Polydore. Laius, the grand-son of this Polydore, married Jocasta, Creon's sister; and it was this marriage which produced the calamities which have furnished the ancient poets with so many subjects for tragedy.

Although we have already seen this history in the Seven Chiefs at the siege of Thebes, a tragedy of Eschylus, and in the two Oedipus's of Sophocles, yet I shall not scruple to follow the thread

of this prologue, and to repeat the principal events which may have escaped the reader: we shall see how variously the same subjects are managed by different poets; and what alterations they have made in the circumstances of each story.

Laius, discontented with a marriage which had so long been barren, implored Apollo to grant him a son: the God replied that he ought not to be solicitous for a successor, since the son he prayed for would be his assassin; and that his posterity would fill his house with grief and murders. Laius paid no regard to this Oracle: he had a son; but immediately after repenting of it, he caused the feet of the infant to be bored through and delivered to some shepherds, to be exposed upon mount Cytheron. Here he was taken up by other shepherds, who called him Oedipus from his swollen feet, and presented him to Merope, the wife of Polybus, king of Corinth. This princess having no child of her own, made him pass for the king's son; but Oedipus, when he grew up, suspected the deceit, and, to clear his doubts, went to Delphos to consult the Oracle of Apollo concerning his birth. Laius, also anxious about his fate, left Thebes, in order to go to Delphos, and enquire of the God whether his son was alive or not. The father and son met in a narrow part of the road to Phocis; Oedipus was on foot, and the king in a chariot. His Equerry used some affronting language to Oedipus, who being hurt by the horses, grew extremely enraged and killed Laius. Some time afterwards, the territory of Thebes was laid waste by the Sphinx: Creon promised the sceptre and Jocasta in marriage to any man who should deliver the city, by unfolding the riddle proposed by the moniter. Oedipus, coming by chance to Thebes, explained the enigma; and having thus preserved Thebes, he was rewarded with the crown, and became the husband of his mother, without knowing he was so. He had two sons by Jocasta, Eteocles and Polynices, and two daughters, Ismena and Antigone, the former was named by the father, the latter by the mother, which was the custom among the Greeks, and singular enough; but as Euripides has expressed it in this prologue, I thought it necessary to mention it. Oedipus, at length discovered that he had married his mother; and in the grief and horror he felt for this involuntary crime, he tore out his own eyes. His sons, being of an age to be sensible of these misfortunes, shut up their father in an apartment of his palace, to conceal as much as possible the shame of their birth. Euripides therefore makes Oedipus to be in Thebes, which Sophocles does not; but supposes that he is

is banished. This unfortunate father loaded his two sons with imprecations, and predicted to them that they should kill each other. The princes, to prevent disputes, agreed to separate, and to reign over Thebes each a year alternately : but Eteocles, dazzled with the lustre of a crown, refused to resign it when his year was expired, and banished Polynices. The injured prince had recourse to the Argives ; he married the daughter of their king, " And his father-in-law, " (pursues Jocasta,) returns with him to Thebes, to demand the " sceptre at the point of his sword."

It is here that the dramatic action begins. The city of Thebes is invested by the troops of Argos ; but Jocasta has prevailed upon the two brothers to consent to a truce, during which Polynices was to enter Thebes to propose terms of accommodation to Eteocles. " Oh Jupiter ! says she, save our wretched house, and reconcile my " sons. Father of all mankind, canst thou suffer those whom thou " hast afflicted to continue always miserable ?"

Such is the prologue which the poet has put into the mouth of Jocasta, who retires after she has brought the audience to that point where the action begins. It may be observed by the different manner in which the same history was treated by the Greek poets, what liberty they assumed of altering events. These alterations indeed were sometimes very considerable, but never carried so far as to shock the public belief ; yet it is certain that in Sophocles, Jocasta dies by her own hand, after discovering that she has married her own son ; whereas here she survives the knowledge of her misfortunes, so various are fabulous traditions.

The following scene is a very happy imitation of Homer: Antigone, the daughter of Jocasta, obtains the queen's permission to leave her women, and with an old man, who conducts her, ascends a balustrade of the palace, in order to take a view of the Argive army. Here there is a remarkable decorum observed. The old man looks carefully on all sides to observe if any of the citizens could see them ; for the Greeks would have been shocked to see a young princess appear alone in an unfrequented place. But all those beauties which abound in Homer's description of the Grecian camp before Troy are to be found in Euripides, who seems to have improved upon his model ; and the more happily, as the tragick poet makes his characters act what Homer has thrown into narration.

In the third book of the Iliad, we read that Priam having made Helen sit down by him upon a tower, from whence they could

could have a view of the whole Grecian army, desires her to give him a particular account of all the chiefs they see; and Helen answers him, that warrior is Ulysses, that Ajax, that other Agamemnon; giving him at the same time the characters of each of them. This is a beautiful piece of artifice to make the principal persons of the poem known to the reader; and so naturally conducted, that it has even found favour with the most severe censurers of that greatest of all poets. Euripides has copied it exactly, in order to bring the whole army of the besiegers in some manner before the eyes of the audience. These two poets, whose design it was to paint every thing naturally to the ages in which they wrote, have by that means instructed us perfectly in the genius of the most ancient sieges that are mentioned in history. Antigone, with the assistance of the old man, ascends the highest part of the palace; but still in sight of the audience. "We are come very seasonably," says the "old man; the Argive army is in motion, and separating into several cohorts." The young princess is terrified at first when she sees the whole field covered with arms, and is extremely apprehensive for the fate of Thebes. Her guide comforts her; and curiosity succeeding to fear, she asks him, like Priam in the Iliad, a great many questions, which he answers in the same manner as Helen; and as the chiefs are all known to him, he names them as he points them out. Here is Hippomedon, there Tydeus, upon that eminence is Parthenopas, and so of all the others. But it is not necessary that we should dwell long upon this passage, because the heroes he describes, have no share in the action of this piece. Antigone asks him where her brother Polynices is; he shews him to her at a great distance, with Adrastus, his father-in-law. She perceives him, and exclaims, "Alas! why can I not like a light cloud traverse in a few minutes the space that separates us, that I may embrace this dear banished brother, who has so long been wretched!" She admires his noble air and the lustre of his arms. "Thy wishes will be gratified," says the old man to her; "Polynices, upon the security of the public faith, will soon be here." At length the old man perceiving some women whom the alarm had drawn from the palace approaching, intreats Antigone to retire to her apartment. "For women, says he, are naturally malignant, and the least occasion furnishes them with a fruitful source of calumny. They aggravate the fault, and enjoy an exquisite pleasure in calumniating each other." This is Euripides.

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The Chorus furnish the third scene, or the Interlude: this Chorus is composed of a number of young virgins of Phenicia. They lament their misfortune in happening to be in a foreign country, at the time it was besieged; and when they were just upon the point of going to Delphos. Euripides would not compose his Chorus of Theban women, whose duty must necessarily have attached them to the interest of Eteocles, unjust as he was: therefore he introduces foreigners; but of a nation allied to the Thebans, the descendants of Agenor having made themselves masters of the city of Tyre. The Tyrians after this conquest, used to send a chosen number of their daughters to Thebes, to be from thence sent to Delphos, where they were made priestesses of Apollo. This which was first a tribute, afterwards became a religious custom. From these Tyrians, or Phenician virgins, the tragedy takes its name. The interlude sung by them here, explains their situation, and the cause of their terror at these preparations for war. They tremble for Thebes, lest their own country should be involved in her miseries: their interests are common, from the strict alliance, and the ties of blood by which the Thebans and the Phenicians are connected.

A C T II.

Polynices appears with his sword drawn in his hand; because he is apprehensive of some treachery from a brother who seems capable of any degree of guilt. However, as soon as he perceives that there are altars near him, (which are sacred asylums) he sheaths his sword, that he may not terrify the Phenicians. They make themselves known to him, and fall prostrate at his feet, according to the law, by which they were considered as captives, subjected to the family of Agenor. After this act of submission, they give the queen notice of his arrival, who comes with eager haste to receive her son.

She embraces him with the most affecting tenderness, such as may be expected from a mother, who once more sees an unhappy son whom she had long lamented, and with the deepest indications of sorrow; such as cutting off her hair, and wearing a mourning habit. She paints the sufferings of an imprisoned father abandoned to his despair; she gently reproaches him with the alliance he had contracted by marrying a foreigner. "I, says she, have not kindled the hymenial torch as happy mothers do. The river Ismenus did not afford thee the nuptial bath; nor has Thebes

" re-

" resounded with shouts of joy in honour of thy bride. May the
 " Gods avert these fatal presages from us; for whatever be the
 " cause, discord, war, thy father, or inevitable fate, these miseries
 " fall all on me."

Polynices answers, that he came to Thebes breathing defiance; but that the love of his country had prevailed over his desire of revenge. He apologizes for having traversed the city with his sword drawn; but his fears were too well grounded not to pay some regard to them. However he relies, he says, upon the truce, and upon the faith of Jocasta for his safety. The sight of the palace, and those places where he had passed years so dear to his remembrance, forces some tender tears from him; but his greatest affliction is to see his mother with so many marks of mourning, and of whose distresses he is unwillingly the cause. This whole interview is extremely tender.

Jocasta, to introduce insensibly the article of a reconciliation between the brothers, which she hoped to effect, leads Polynices to recount his adventures. What follows is a close dialogue in single verses. Polynices, in a very affecting manner, describes the extreme distress to which he had been reduced: a miserable prince banished from his country, without friends and support: he has even proved the calamities of indigence and want. He says expressly, " That none can subsist upon the nobleness of their birth; and that one's country is the most desirable of all blessings, since an exile has no longer either friends or any resource." He afterwards tells Jocasta in what manner he obtained the friendship of the king of Argos.

This prince had received an oracle, by which he was commanded to give his two daughters in marriage to a lion and a boar. Polynices and Tydeus, being both banished, came to his court to implore his aid: he interpreted the oracle in their favour, married his daughters to them, and swore to re-establish them in their several countries by force of arms. Here Polynices sighs on reflecting that he leads an army against his native land. " I call the Gods to witness," says he, " that unwillingly I wage war against what is dearest to me in the world; but for thee, my mother, is reserved the glory of terminating our woes, of reconciling two rival brothers, and of recalling peace, so much to be desired by thee, by me, and the whole state."

Polynices speaks like a king unjustly dethroned, with grandeur and moderation; but he concludes with a very singular sentiment,

and which clearly marks the excess of misery to which his exile had reduced him, in times very different from ours; in which however we have seen distressed monarchs, notwithstanding the humanity of their benefactors, struggling with the effects of the most shocking poverty. "Wealth, says this unhappy prince, is what "is most revered among men, an indigent prince is nothing. This "is the cause of my coming to Thebes at the head of an army." The Chorus give the queen notice that Eteocles appears.

This prince, whose fierce and impetuous character is finely contrasted with the noble, yet mild disposition of Polynices, speaks in these terms as he enters: "Behold me here, madam: it is in "obedience to you that I come. What is it you require of "me?" He would make a merit of his consenting to this interview with his brother.

"Stay, answers the queen; precipitation in conjectures delicate like this is always hurtful: prudence requires that we "should proceed calmly and deliberately if we hope to succeed. "Soften those fiery glances, Eteocles, suppress that rage which "seems ready to break out; it is not a Medusa whom thou beholdest, alas! it is thy brother who approaches thee. And do "thou Polynices turn thy eyes upon thy brother; this sight will "dispose thee to speak to him, and to hear him calmly. I have "but this advice to give you both: remember that in an interview "between two angry friends, each should forget what is past, and "think only on the occasion that brings them together. Polynices, it is thy part to speak first, since thou art come to make thy "complaints at the head of an army, and to demand justice, as thou "allegest. Oh, may some God become the arbitrator, the judge, "and the reconciler of this difference!"

POLYNICES. Truth neither seeks nor needs the embellishments of art; she speaks with plainness; she despises the turns of artificial eloquence, and in herself consists her force. It is not so with injustice; conscious of her weakness, she calls in sophistry to her assistance. It was my intention to provide for the common interests of the state, my brother's, and my own; I was desirous of preventing the effects of my father's imprecations; I yielded the crown to Eteocles for a year: I became a voluntary fugitive, but upon condition of reigning in my turn; I expected not to suffer the injuries that have been inflicted on me, nor to return like an enemy to plunge a sword in the bosom of my country. Eteocles agreed to share the sceptre with me; he called the Gods to witness to the

rectitude of his intentions; and yet, in contempt of his oaths, he still reigns, and fills the place which I ought now to fill. Let him restore the sceptre to me, and behold me ready to disband the army, and to yield him the crown in my turn. On this condition I will free thee from thy apprehensions; spare the walls of Thebes, and carry on no longer a criminal assault; but if a demand so reasonable is refused me, I am determined to do myself justice by my sword. I attest the Gods who know the sincerity of my heart and the equity of my cause, that I am unjustly driven out of my native country.

The Chorus approve a speech so reasonable and so moderate.

ETEOCLES. If all men thought alike with regard to what is honourable, there would no longer be any dissentions amongst us; but minds are variously affected by the same things. We are all agreed upon the name of honour, the thing itself is differently understood. I will not disguise my sentiments, mother. I would scale the heavens, and penetrate into the bowels of the earth, if by these means I could obtain a nobler sceptre. To me a throne is a blessing so valuable, that I can never resolve to yield it to another. How despicable should I appear, if I who have been a king could afterwards descend to the condition of a subject? how shameful would it be to yield this throne to a traitor who comes in arms to lay waste his native country? what infamy for Thebes, and for myself, if fear of the Argive lances should force me to descend from the throne, and place a conqueror there? No, princess; it is not with sword in hand that he should have endeavoured to negotiate with me: his arguments, if reasonable, would have been as powerful as his army. Let him dwell in Thebes; I consent to it; but let him not hope that after having given law to him, I shall debase myself so far as to receive it from him (*To Polynices.*) Go then employ all the horrors of war against thy country, cover these fields with hostile troops; I will not resign my crown. Thou mayst talk of justice; I will observe it in all things; but if ever it is excusable to violate justice, it is when a sceptre is in question†.

JOCASTA. Misery is not the only portion of old age, my son; that experience which it brings along with it is a sufficient compensation, and guides us more securely than the impetuosity of youth.

" † Si violer la justice & le droit
" Il est licite à l'homme en quelque endroit,
" C'est pour régner qu'il se le doit permettre."

Plutarch's treatise of reading the poets, translated by Amyot.

Alas!

Alas ! by what fatality has Ambition, that dangerous Goddess, prevailed upon thee to break thy oaths ? How many families, how many states has she entered, and never left them till she had made them miserable ? It is her who transports thee thus, my son. Ah ! would it not be more glorious for thee to be contented with that happy equality which connects friends, warriors, and kingdoms with each other ? equality is the sacred law of mankind.

Jocasta is a little tedious here in her panegyric upon equality, which she calls the principle of weights, measures, and the successive return of day and night : from whence she concludes, that Eteocles ought to share the sceptre with his brother. Those six or seven lines we have taken notice of, as well as many others, well deserve to be retained; but this kind of reasoning would not please us, and was only fit for the Greeks, who were fond of sentences.

Jocasta, speaks with more dignity, when she calls a crown a glorious burthen *. " What is to be found in it, says she, but more labour, and " more grandeur than in other conditions of life ? Those who are " capable of setting bounds to their desires will be contented with a " mediocrity. Riches belong truly to the Gods : they are only " lent to men, and therefore the Gods resume them when they " please. Judge of this truth by the instability of fortune. If I " should ask thee, oh my son ! which is most dear to thee, the " throne, or the safety of the state ; wouldest thou dare to answer " that it is the throne thou valuest most ? but if Polynices should " conquer, if Argos should prevail over Thebes, thou wouldest see " this very Thebes laid waste : thou wouldest see our captive vir- " gins torn by the cruel enemy from the arms of their mothers. " Ah ! how dearly would the Thebans pay then for this supreme " power, which has so many charms for thee. Such, Eteocles, are " the arguments I had to urge to thee."

" As for thee, Polynices, I shall tell thee with the same frankness, " that Adrastus was to blame to offer thee his fatal succours ; and " thou wert to blame for accepting them, with an intention to " destroy thy country. For alas ! if thou shouldst take Thebes, " (but may the Gods avert this misfortune) if thou shouldst take " Thebes, my son, how wouldest thou erect trophies for thy con- " quest ? how wouldest thou offer sacrifices to the Gods for such

* Euripides in this place speaks like a democratic republican. However, he elsewhere seems to adopt sentiments very different; and Plato, his cotemporary, blames him for praising monarch and monarchy too highly.

" impious success? What inscription wouldest thou place on the
 " spoils heaped upon the banks of the river that saw thy birth?
 " Polynices, wouldest thou say, consecrated to the Gods these arms
 " won from his country, which he has reduced to ashes. Ah, my
 " son, mayst thou never be stained with such impious glory! but
 " if, on the contrary, thou shouldest be vanquished, how wilt thou
 " be able to appear again in Argos, after leaving these fields co-
 " vered with the bodies of her citizens who fell in thy defence?
 " will not Adrastus hear murmurs like these from his people? how
 " fatal has the alliance been which our king has contracted with
 " Polynices? The lives of his people have been sacrificed to this
 " marriage. Believe me, Polynices, thou hastenest to a double mis-
 " fortune; thou art going to lose the friendship of the Argives,
 " and thou wilt be disappointed in thy hopes of gaining the The-
 " ban crown. Restrain, my dear sons, restrain your fatal ambition.
 " Alas! what miseries may we not expect from two furious ri-
 " vals, who have the same object in view?"

The Chorus, in a few words, redouble their prayers for peace. It is not Eteocles therefore who interupts Jocasta, as Barnes supposes. This commentator, (to whom we are indebted for that fine edition of Euripides, printed in London in the year 1694, in which he has collected the criticisms of almost all the commentators upon this poet, without reckoning his own notes and corrections, in which he has sometimes succeeded very happily) exclaims here, and in other places with too much boldness against the scholiasts and criticks, because they do not entirely approve of Jocasta's speech, which they alledge to be weak and inconclusive. These criticks may be in the wrong, although Barnes should be found to have unjustly accused them of ignorance. In the wrong they are without doubt, since in Jocasta's situation it would be difficult to imagine any thing more sensible, or more elegant simplicity displayed than in her way of reasoning upon the real interests of Eteocles and Polynices. But the argument Barnes urges to decry them is excessively ill founded. If the queen's discourse appears weak to them, says he, it is because they would not perceive that she has not said all that she intended to say; and that she is interrupted by Eteocles, when she is upon the point of continuing her argument. Now it is the Chorus who speak immediately after the queen, and Eteocles speaks after them; besides, Jocasta had said to this prince what she thought necessary, before she addressed her-

herself to her other son. Eteocles therefore speaks thus, after the Chorus:

ETEOCLIS. We are not now to dispute in words. We lose time: thy efforts mother are all fruitless. Again I declare that I will consent to no other terms than those I have already offered. I am now in possession of the throne, and I am resolved to be so always. Spare me new counsels, mother; and do thou, Polynices, go out of these walls, or death awaits thee.

POLYNICES. And by whose hand shall I fall? where is this invulnerable hero, who shall pierce this bosom without dreading a like fate from me?

ETEOCLIS. I am he; tremble to behold this arm.

POLYNICES. Me dost thou bid tremble! prosperity inspires some persons with too great fondness for life to make them dreadful.

ETEOCLIS. I understand thee; it is because thou fearest to meet me in a single combat, that thou comest to brave me at the head of a numerous army.

POLYNICES. Prudence will prevail over blind impetuosity.

ETEOCLIS. Thou mayst thank the truce for thy security, otherwise this insult should be thy last.

POLYNICES. Once more I demand of thee the sceptre which is due to me.

ETEOCLIS. It is mine, and I will keep it.

POLYNICES. And is it solely thine?

ETEOCLIS. Cease thy importunity, and be gone.

POLYNICES. Ye sacred altars of my paternal house----

ETEOCLIS. Which thou art preparing to overthrow.

POLYNICES. Oh listen to my complaints!

ETEOCLIS. Thinkest thou they will listen to a citizen who has taken arms against them?

POLYNICES. Ye guardian Gods of Thebes!

ETEOCLIS. Those Gods are all thy enemies.

POLYNICES. I have been banished from my native country.

ETEOCLIS. And thou returnest to lay it desolate.

POLYNICES. I am forced to it by thy injustice. Hear me, ye equitable powers!----

ETEOCLIS. Away, and supplicate the Gods of Mycene.

POLYNICES. Thou art past all fear of the Gods.

ETEOCLIS. But at least I am not the declared enemy of my country.

POLY-

POLYNICES. And art thou determined to exclude me from my inheritance?

ETEOCLES. I will do more, if thou provokest me to it. (*Here he lays his hand on his sword.*)

POLYNICES. Oh my father, thou hearest the outrage that is offered me!

ETEOCLES. He also hears the noise of thy arms.

POLYNICES. Oh mother!---

ETEOCLES. Profane not that name; to thee it is forbidden to use it.

POLYNICES. Oh Thebes!----

ETEOCLES. Go, implore thy Argos.

POLYNICES. Ah, doubt it not! I will have recourse to Argos. Oh mother, to thee I will be ever grateful!

ETEOCLES. Depart.

POLYNICES. *I go, but suffer me to have the consolation of seeing my father once more.

ETEOCLES. I will not.

POLYNICES. Let me embrace my sisters at least.

ETEOCLES. Thou shalt never see them more.

POLYNICES. Oh my loved sisters!

ETEOCLES. How! art thou not their most cruel enemy?

POLYNICES. Mother, farewell; mayst thou be ever happy.

JOCASTA. Alas, my miseries have reached their utmost height! oh my dear son!

POLYNICES. I am no longer thy son.

JOCASTA. Ah! to what new miseries am I then reserved?

POLYNICES. Thus loaded by him with indignities, I am unworthy of that name.

JOCASTA. It is I only who am outraged.

POLYNICES to Eteocles. Which is thy post?

ETEOCLES. Why dost thou ask?

POLYNICES. Because there thou shalt see me.

ETEOCLES. 'Tis what I wish.

* We are obliged to Barnes for this verse, but it is clear that Dolce had seen it before who restored it at first by conjecture, afterwards upon the authority of a manuscript;

"Non posso

"Non obbedirti à questa volta: bene

"Ti vo pregar che mi soteda, ch'io

"Vegga mio padre"

Jo-

JOCASTA. Oh, wretched mother that I am! Alas, my sons, what is your fatal purpose?

ETEOCLES. That will soon be known.

JOCASTA. Do you intend to fulfil the fatal imprecations of your father?

POLYNICES. Perish our whole race!

ETEOCLES. Yes, when this sword shall cease to bathe itself in blood.

POLYNICES. Oh, thou my native land, I take thee, as well as the Gods to witness, that I am unjustly deprived of the rank of a king's son, and banished like a slave! If thou art overthrown by this arm, impute it not to me, but to him who is the only author of all thy misfortunes. My enterprize is as involuntary as my exile is unjust. Oh Apollo, friends, altars, receive my farewell! I quit you now perhaps never more to behold you: yet surely no. The Goddesses of Hope smile on me; and the just Gods will assist me to force the sceptre from an usurper, although at the price of his blood.

ETEOCLES. Depart.

Accordingly, the two brothers separate in a manner that may be easily imagined after the conversation we have read. Jocasta retires overwhelmed with sorrow, and the Chorus remain to sing the Interlude; in which, if the expression may be allowed, they describe the birth of Thebes. This might appear cold and uninteresting, if we did not reflect that it enters naturally into the subject, being contrasted with the fall of this city, which throughout the whole piece they represent as unavoidable.

A C T III.

Eteocles returns, and looks about for one of his officers to send in search of Creon, when this prince, who was likewise enquiring for him, enters. The question now is, in what manner they shall support the siege.

Creon informs the young king that a deserter is come into Thebes, who brings advice that the Argives intend to invest and attack the city at the same time on all sides. Eteocles, by a natural emotion, which marks the impetuosity of his character, resolves to fight without the walls, and promises that he will put all to fire and sword. Creon, like an experienced man, endeavours to restrain his youthful ardor, and gives him to understand that the Argive army, being very numerous and composed of brave soldiers, he ought

ought to be cautious how he hazarded a decisive action; which if he should be vanquished, would leave him no farther resource.

The king proposes to fall upon the enemy in the night, which we call a *camisado*. Creon disapproves of this proposal also, as dangerous, and of no use. Eteocles then says, he will engage them with the whole force of his cavalry. This project is also rejected. "What is to be done, then; shall I give up the city?" answers the impatient prince. "No, replies Creon, but the enemies have seven chiefs, who are all at the same time to attack the seven gates of Thebes. Let us support the assault within our walls, and oppose to the besiegers seven warriors alike distinguished for their prudence and valour; for one of these qualities without the other will be of little use." These are the seven chiefs of Eschylus.

If we examine this scene a little closer, we shall find that Euripides has here a stroke of satire against his predecessor, which is delicate enough. "I will go, says Eteocles, and chuse out these seven warriors, and appoint them their several posts: to name them all would be to lose time, while the enemy is at our gates." Eschylus employs a whole scene in regulating the posts of these seven heroes, whom he opposes to those of the enemy; whose names and characters are also related by an officer, without forgetting even the devices and mottos of their armour, which he describes at length.

But Eschylus however has the advantage of Euripides in the speech he puts into the mouth of Eteocles when he goes to battle. In Euripides this prince makes a kind of will in case of his death, and leaves the crown to Creon, recommending Jocasta and his sisters to his care. With regard to Oedipus, he only says coldly, that his father had drawn his misfortunes upon himself; and that he was not to be pitied, since it would not be his fault if the curses he had laid on his sons were not fulfilled.

This is a strange sentiment to be avowed by a son, although it is the poet's design to render him odious. He remembers also, that he has not required an oracle of Tiresias, as was the custom; and he orders Creon to consult him, which he dare not do himself; because he has enraged this prophet, he says, by openly despising his predictions. But why then it may be asked, does Eteocles have recourse to those oracles which he holds in contempt? This seems a little strained; but the reason is, that Tiresias had threatened these ungrateful sons with the indignation of the Gods for their treatment of their unhappy father. These words therefore shew the

impious character of Eteocles in a stronger light. Lastly, at the remembrance of Polynices, his implacable hatred shews itself in forbidding Creon to allow funeral honours to his brother; and makes it death for any of his subjects to disobey him on this article: a terrible decree, which serves as a prediction for another epistle.

While the king calls for his armour and departs, the Chorus deplore the horrors of war, and the fatal consequences of discord between brothers. They recount anew all the crimes with which the family of Oedipus were polluted. Meantime, Meneceus, the son of Creon, who had been sent by his father to fetch Tiresias, arrives, leading the old blind prophet by the hand. Euripides represents him loaden with years and infirmities, and in a manner which we would think too low for tragedy. Tiresias had been absent from Thebes some time; he was but just returned from the city of Athens, which he had rendered victorious over a powerful enemy: therefore Creon relates to him in few words the occasion of the war with which Thebes was threatened, and requires an oracle. The prophet consents to give him one, not to oblige Eteocles, but Creon; and begins to explain himself with the dignity suitable to his character, and the veneration all Greece paid him. The sense of his speech is, that the Gods were resolved in the person of Oedipus, to give a dreadful example to the Greeks, that his children were desirous of burying him in oblivion, by concealing the miserable prince from the eyes of the world, as if they were able to deceive the Gods, a complicated crime against heaven; and their father. “What have I not done, what have I not said, pur-
“sues he, to recal them to their duty! Instead of prevailing upon
“them by my counsels, I have drawn their hatred upon me; but
“death pursues them, death by each other’s hand: they will fall
“surrounded with dying warriors. Thebes shall long lament this
“miserable day. Oh wretched Thebes! I see thee tottering on
“the brink of ruin. Such is thy destiny: to have been happy,
“the sons of Oedipus should have been neither thy citizens nor
“thy kings: a race accurst, whose fate it is to ruin thee. But
“since thou hast not been able to avoid this misfortune, one re-
“source alone remains; but I am silent. It suits not me to pro-
“pose a remedy so shocking. I go, farewell! Alas! what have
“I to lose by being involved in the general destruction of the
“Thebans.”

Creon, eager to know what the prophet is desirous of concealing from him stops him as he is preparing to retire. The prophet

refuses to explain himself; but at length seeming to be overcome by Creon's importunities, he consents to declare the secret, provided Meneceus is not present. Creon, depending upon the prudence of his son, insists upon his stay, and Tiresias suffers the dreadful mystery to escape him. "If thou wouldst save Thebes, says he, "thou must sacrifice thy son Meneceus." The astonished father makes him repeat the horrid words. "No, cries he." Afterwards, "I will not understand thee." He repents his having demanded an oracle, but it is now too late, the fatal decree is pronounced. He has recourse to intreaties; a feeble barrier against a prophet, who having once declared himself threatens Creon, if he does not comply, to publish the sentence of the Gods. Creon requires to know at least upon what grounds the Gods demand the life of his son; and Tiresias to satisfy him, goes back as far as the history of Cadmus. This son of Agenor when he arrived in the land of Thebes, sent his companions to draw water from the fountain of Dirce. This fountain was kept by a furious dragon, who devoured them. Cadmus killed the dragon; and by the advice of Pallas, sowed his teeth in the earth, from which, instantly a great number of warriors were produced, who turned their arms against each other, and all were slain except five, who assisted Cadmus to build the city of Thebes.

This fable being the subject of the Chorus, and introduced as an ornament into the body of the tragedy, I thought it necessary to give it here in as few words as possible. It may be seen at length in the third book of Ovid's Metamorphoses. The dragon having been under the protection of the God Mars, "This Deity, says "Tiresias, was resolved to revenge his death by the blood of one "of the princes descended from the warriors produced by his teeth." Now Meneceus was the last of this race; he was unmarried: in a word, he was the victim demanded by Mars; and the dragon's den must be sprinkled with his blood. These arguments were thought unanswerable by the ancient superstition; therefore Creon has nothing to urge in favour of his son, the victim being so plainly pointed out. Tiresias leaves him in the sad necessity either of sacrificing his son, or of suffering Thebes to perish.

Creon, scarce recovering from that torrent of overwhelming grief which had opprest him, displays all the tender and mournful sentiments of a father, upon the point of losing a beloved son. He cannot resolve to deliver him; he would rather die himself, and to prevent the tumult which this oracle may create, he commands

mands Meneceus to fly instantly far from Thebes. The young prince seems to consent to this proposal, and only desires time to take leave of Jocasta. It would seem that Creon is too ready to believe his son will consent to this flight; and besides, it is difficult enough to effect it, the city being surrounded with enemies. However that may be, Creon is scarce gone when Meneceus declares to the Chorus, that it was to deceive the sorrow of his father that he feigned to yield obedience to his orders. "Happy stratagem!" says he. Creon would deprive Thebes of its only resource. This may be pardonable in a father; but should I be excusable if I betrayed my country! know then that I go to be your deliverer; and to sacrifice myself for the Thebans." Accordingly he departs determined to throw himself from the top of the walls towards the cave of the dragon, after wounding himself first, that it may be sprinkled with his blood. "My life, says he, is the only good I can bestow upon my country: is it possible to make it a more salutary or more precious present? happy that republic whose citizens all concur in their endeavours for the preservation of their country!"

This is a kind of episode, or subordinate action, which is rarely found in ancient tragedy. The Greek poets were of opinion that Oedipus prevented the effect of the principal action; and indeed however they may be managed, they turn aside the attention of the audience, at least they divide it, and rob tragedy of that beautiful simplicity which is so capable of pleasing in itself. However, this episode of Euripides, although a little forced, will justify those of our own time, if they were not carried much farther than his; and if they did not almost always turn upon love.

This sacrifice of Meneceus recalls to the Chorus the idea of the Sphinx, who had often been gorged with human blood; and naturally reminds them of the great service Oedipus did the state by delivering it from this monster. The generosity of Meneceus, who in such early youth runs voluntarily to death for the preservation of his fellow citizens, makes likewise a beautiful part of the interlude. It must be confessed that the poet has shewn great judgment in giving this young prince so much presence of mind as to conceal his intention from his father; and so much courage and resolution as to go to death, without any other witnesses of this voluntary sacrifice than the Chorus: but even the presence of the Chorus here may be thought improper; for is it natural that they would suffer him to sacrifice himself without informing Creon at least

least of his design? Yes, certainly; because this Chorus are foreigners, who on account of their alliance with Thebes, and their own situation, were more interested in the public good, than in the particular happiness of Creon. In tragedies divested of the Chorus, as the manner is now, the poet on such an occasion, must have had recourse to a soliloquy, or to some confidant; which would have been more perplexing, and less animated. But, is it natural also, that a great and illustrious action should be performed without any witness to it? no one who understands the drama will pretend to say that the audience are witnesses; yet this is supposed in practice. How shall we excuse this contradiction?

ACT IV.

A messenger comes in great haste to acquaint Jocasta with the situation of affairs between the two armies. She comes out of the palace; and the solicitude of a mother for her children, and a queen for the state, produces here a very fine effect: she is instantly informed that both the princes are safe; and that the Thebans are victorious. The attention is thus kept up with great art. "It is the death of Meneceus, says the messenger, which has procured the Thebans this success: for after this sacrifice, Eteocles posted the seven chiefs as he had designed: he distributed the bodies of horse to support the infantry. Immediately the enemies advanced towards the extremity of the trenches: the trumpets sounded on both sides. Pathenope, Amphiaralis, Hypomedon, Polynices, Tydeus, Capaneus, and Adraustus, the seven chiefs of the enemy's army, commanded each the attack of a gate." The messenger having named them describes afterwards the armour of each, with their devises in a manner little different from Eschylus*. I thought it necessary to abridge this description in both poets, there being nothing in it very interesting to us. It is sufficient to give some idea of it; and to observe casually, that this scene of Euripides seems to be better managed in the recital than that of Eschylus in the action; although the latter has its beauties, in that, Eschylus shews Eteocles disposing the order of battle, and distributing the posts of his warriors before the eyes of the audience.

"At first, continues the messenger, we made use of the bow, the sling, and stones which we forced out of the walls. The

* See the Seven Chiefs at the siege of Thebes. V. II. ACT III.

" besieged had the advantage; when Tydeus and Polynices crying out that a general assault must be made, the battle grew fiercer, and many fell on both sides." Here the messenger gives a circumstantial account of the action, after the manner of Homer. As this is an ancient siege, we will give one example from it: " Capaneus, fixing a ladder to the walls, swore that the thunder itself should not hinder him from taking the city. He mounts the ladder amidst a shower of stones, which he guarded against by covering himself with his shield. Already he had reached the battlement, when Jupiter suddenly struck him with his thunder, and the earth trembled in a most dreadful manner. The unhappy warrior was torn in pieces; his hair was carried aloft by the winds; his blood streamed upon the earth; his mangled limbs were cast on each side; and his burning carcase was seen to fall like a whirlwind. In a word, he seemed another Ixion upon the wheel. Adrastus, perceiving that Jupiter was against him, caused the assailants to retire from the trenches, &c."

The messenger adds, that the besieged, encouraged by this miracle, made a sudden sally with the cavalry. " They fell upon the enemy; they broke their chariots of war; they covered the plain with dead bodies, and delivered Thebes."

In this recital, which is very long, the activity of Eteocles is well described: he seems to be every where at once: he sends succours wherever they are necessary. The confusion among the troops of the enemy, their broken chariots, and heaps of dead, are represented also with great spirit and liveliness.

Jocasta, upon this news, feels transport worthy of her character as a queen and mother. The state is preserved, and her sons still live; but she pities Creon, who has so dearly purchased the safety of Thebes. Being desirous to know the consequence of this action, and the last resolutions of Eteocles and Polynices, the officer says to her, " Enquire no more, great princess; hitherto every thing is favourable to thee." These ambiguous words give new force to Jocasta's curiosity; she presses the messenger to explain himself. " What wouldst thou have more? answers he, " both the princes thy sons are alive."

JOCASTA. I would know in one word, if the event of this battle be as fortunate as the battle itself.

MESSINGER. Suffer me, oh queen! to depart. Eteocles has occasion for me.

The messenger in vain forms pretences for not saying more. Jocasta forces him to declare all he knows; and at length he confesses that the two princes have resolved to decide their quarrel by a single combat. "Eteocles, pursues he, appeared on the top of the walls; and commanding silence, spoke in these terms: Ye brave warriors who are in arms against me, and you, ye Thebans, hear me. Be no longer thus prodigal of your lives in favour either of Polynices or me. I will fight singly with my brother; if he dies by my hand, I shall reign unrivalled, and if I am vanquished I will yield him the throne. Stay not oh, Argives, to perish here, but return into your native country! and you, oh Thebans, have already shed blood enough for me!"

Polynices eagerly accepted this proposal, which was applauded with the loud acclamations of both armies. A truce was immediately agreed to; and in the midst of the two camps, the chief on both sides swore to observe conditions so just and so reasonable. * The two princes now prepared for fight: the Thebans surrounded Eteocles, to arm him in steel; while the Argives did the same office for Polynices. The brothers appeared unmoved in each other's presence: clad in shining armour, they burned with equal ardor for the combat. The warriors on both sides exhorted them to support their fame. "Oh Polynices! said the Argives, the honour of Argos is in thy hands: it belongs to thee to erect a statue to Jupiter, for a monument of thy glory." "Go, brave Eteocles, said the Thebans, go, and remember that thou fightest for thy country: that thou hast conquered; and that thou art a king. Thus did they animate them for the combat: mean time the priests were employed in consulting the entrails of the victims, the flames, and other auguries; from whence they judged of the success of the combat. As for thee, oh queen! if thou hast any resource in thy own prudence, or in the arts of enchantment, haste to the field, and dissuade the princes from this horrid fight. Thou art upon the point of losing two sons in one day. Oh, haste then to them! to them the danger is certain; and to thee the victory of either must be fatal!"

Jocasta, without answering the messenger, who has perhaps too long delayed to tell her of a circumstance so important, sends for Antigone. This princess enters, full of grief and terror: Jocasta in-

* One might say that Menelaus and Paris are here preparing for fight. That this whole description is an imitation of the third book of the Iliad.

forms her that her two brothers are preparing to murder each other. "Let us go, says she, let us throw ourselves at their feet." Antigone, before she is fully informed of what is passing, makes some scruple to appear within view of the two camps: such was the modesty and decorum of those times, of which the Greek poets give us frequent examples. But as soon as the princess hears that there is not a moment to be lost, and that all is desperate, unless she flies to her brothers, she is the first to press the queen her mother to make no delay. Jocasta, in her turn, urges her to follow her with hasty steps. "For should we delay ever so little, says she, we are lost; and thou wilt behold me expire upon the bodies of thy brothers."

The Phenician virgins redouble the concern and curiosity of the spectators, by exclamations of terror and grief, which express the sentiments of the people. "Oh most unhappy mother! oh wretched sons! which of the two will be bathed in the blood of his brother? which of them are we to lament! These exclamations and many others are more lively and affecting than it is possible to represent in our language.

A C T V.

In this act Creon appears lamenting the death of his son, whose sad remains he brings to Jocasta, to receive the honours of a funeral. He enquires for this princess: but the Chorus acquaint him with the strange combat between Eteocles and Polynices, and the departure of Jocasta and Antigone; who are gone to throw themselves between their swords.

Immediately afterwards a messenger enters. Grief is imprest on his countenance, and his very air declares the mutual death of the two princes. Creon, and the Chorus scarce recover from the astonishment to which this news throws them, when the messenger adds, that Jocasta also is dead. Here he resumes the narration which he had left off in the preceding act: "Thou knowest, says he, the victory we gained upon the walls; no one here can be ignorant of what passed so near him."

But how then, it may be asked, does it happen that Creon is ignorant of the single combat between the two brothers? for he is supposed to know nothing of it, although he is but just come from the cave of the dragon, from whence he bore the carcase of his son. This seems to be a fault which Euripides has committed, in order to avoid another; namely, that of repeating the history of

the siege to Creon, who had not heard it; or, of omitting the consequences which followed it. If the ancients were guilty of any errors of sort, it was owing to their extreme nicety in making their actors come and go with propriety: a circumstance which is very little attended to in our days. But in justification of Euripides, it may be supposed that Creon had his mind so wholly employed upon his son's death, that after he had been an eye-witness of the victory of the Thebans, he was little solicitous about what followed, which was the single fight between Eteocles and Polynices.

" After the two princes were armed, continued the messenger, " they advanced to meet each other between the two armies, and " prepared to begin the combat with their lances. Then Polynices turning towards Argos, Goddess of the Argives, said he, oh " venerable Juno, I am now under thy protection; my marriage " with the daughter of Adrastus, and the retreat he gave me in his " palace, which was my asylum, are my sureties for this protection; " grant that I may subdue my brother; and that his blood may " dye my victorious hands! Alas! too well I know that the con- " quest I implore of thee is impious and disgraceful; but it is ne- " cessary." These words drew tears from the eyes of the soldiers; they looked one on another, and lamented the cruel necessity to which Polynices was reduced, either of dying himself, or of giving death to his brother. As for Eteocles, he turned towards the temple of Pallas. " Oh daughter of Jupiter, cried he, grant that this arm " may throw the lance into the bosom of a brother who comes to " spread desolation throughout my country and his own. That in- " stant the blaze of the torch was seen, the signal for this unnatu- " ral combat."

A lighted torch was the signal for battle, before trumpets were in use; yet Euripides joins both these signals together in the siege of Thebes. A priest crowned with laurel bearing a lighted torch in his hand, used to walk before the army in the heat of battle; he was almost always spared by the enemy. From hence came the ancient proverbial manner of expressing a total defeat: *Even the torch-bearer himself was not spared.* And hence, perhaps, came the custom of representing discord with lighted torches.

" The two champions, proceeds the officer, flew to meet each " other; and like two boars who sharpen their tusks, they foam " with rage, and each in the same moment attack, and is attacked." Here he describes with great simplicity, the double combat. " They " begin with the lance; they covered themselves with their large buck-

" bucklers, and endeavoured by turns to wound each other in some " unguarded place." The messenger adds, that the spectators wrapt in attention, were more agitated than the combatants themselves. " Eteocles, says he, happening to slip his foot, and his shield falling aside, he received a stroke, which raised a joyful shout " among the Argives. Polynices, in his turn, left part of his body " uncovered by his buckler, and felt himself wounded, and then " the Thebans triumphed ; but Eteocles, breaking his lance with " this stroke, retired a few paces back, and heaving up a large " stone hurled it at Polynices so luckily that he broke his lance " likewise. The combat now became equal again ; they drew " their swords, and eagerly approached each other : their bucklers " resounded with the blows they gave and received. But Eteocles " had recourse to a Thessalian artifice." The scholiasts then painted the Thessalians as they have since done all the Greeks. " He drew back his left foot, and advancing his right, stooped al- " most to the ground, and plunged his sword into the belly of his " brother. Polynices fell, almost drowned in his own blood. " Eteocles, supposing he had conquered, threw away his sword, and " imprudently drew near his enemy to seize his spoils, when Po- " lynices collecting all his remaining strength suddenly thrust his " sword into the bosom of Eteocles. Both lay extended on the " field biting the dust; both conquered and both were conquerors."

Creon, with sighs, observes that the imprecations of Oedipus have been fulfilled. " The two princes, continues the messenger, " were just fallen, when their wretched mother, accompanied by her " daughter, appeared. At the sight of her sons bathed in their blood, " Oh too tardy succours ! cried she; then throwing herself beside " them, she wept over them by turns. Ah, my dear brothers, ex- " claimed Antigone, is it thus then that you abandon a mother " and a sister ? Eteocles, who now scarce breathed, opened his " eyes ; he knew the queen, and offering her his bloody hand, ex- " pressed his sorrow and his remorse by his tears. His brother al- " so perceiving the queen and princefs, said, 'tis done, I die, my " only grief is, for the condition in which I leave a mother and " a sister ; and even my perfidious brother : for alas ! this enemy " is still dear to me. I beg of you as a last favour, that you will " not refuse me a tomb in my native country ; and that you will " appease offended Thebes: the honour of a tomb in the The- " ban territory will recompense me for the crown which I have " lost. Oh, my mother, let thy hands close my eyes ! He himself

" laid the hand of Jocasta upon his eyes : farewell, said he, with a
 " dying voice, the shades of death involve me. That instant, they
 " both expired. Jocasta in silence beheld these horrors; then
 " drawing the sword out of the bosom of Eteocles, she plunged it
 " in her own, and fell upon the bodies of her sons, which she held
 " close embraced."

The messenger concludes this long narration, with informing Creon of the dispute which arose between the Argives and the Thebans, each side claiming the victory, in right of the prince whose interests they had espoused. From words, he says, they proceeded to blows; and the Argives were put to flight, with the loss of six hundred men.

Immediately afterwards, the bodies of Jocasta, Eteocles, and Polynices, are brought upon the stage. Antigone returns without a veil, and her hair dishevelled: the sight of these bodies, which she had caused to be brought from the field, throws her into the deepest despair. Her grief breaks out in short exclamations, interrupted with sighs and groans; and her situation speaks more than her tongue: she calls even upon things inanimate to share her sorrows; then gazing on the bodies, " Upon which of them," says she, shall I first spread this hair which I tear off? upon the bleeding bosom of my mother, or the barbarous wounds of my brothers? Oh Oedipus! come out, come out of thy dark dwelling."

Oedipus appears, " Why hast thou recalled me to the light, " my daughter, says he, the light which I shall never more behold? Why hast thou forced me to leave my tomb, I who am now but a phantom? Thou hast no longer either a wife or sons, answers Antigone: with grief I say it, and not to aggravate thy woes; thy fatal genius has rushed upon them, and urged them to their ruin." Oedipus sighs, groans, and weeps. " Ah! what would thy sorrows be, resumes the princess, if thou couldst behold their bodies extended on the earth?" She then recounts in few words, but eloquently, in what manner they perished; and the Chorus wish that at least a day so full of horrors for the family of Oedipus may be the last of their unhappy days: but Creon appears, to plunge them into new misfortunes.

He declares himself king of Thebes, according to the last will of Eteocles: he resolves that his son Hemon shall espouse Antigone; and that Oedipus shall go into banishment. Tiresias, adds he, assures us, that unless Oedipus is banished, Thebes shall

never enjoy a durable peace; and it is with regret that I comply with this oracle. "Oh destiny, exclaims Oedipus! sure no mortal was ever born under more horrid auspices!" Here he enumerates all his misfortunes; the oracle delivered before his birth; the manner in which he was exposed upon Mount Cytheron; the cruel service that was rendered him in saving his life; the murder of his father; his marriage with his mother; his blindness; his imprisonment; the miserable deaths of Jocasta, and his two sons; and all this terminated by a banishment more cruel than death itself. "From whom shall he procure that assistance necessary to support a wretched being? who will be his guide? who will take care of his life? Jocasta would have done it, but she is no more." He reproaches Creon with his barbarity; but far from descending to mean supplications: he declares that he will not bend the knee to a tyrant and that till his death he will maintain the dignity of a king.

The new king, under pretence of observing the strictest justice, carries his tyrannous severity still farther: he commands that the body of Polynices should be cast out of Thebes, without giving it sepulchral honours; because he came against his country with fire and sword: he even forbids the burying it, under pain of death.

Antigone, reduced to despair by these last strokes of fate, which seem to her more cruel than all the former, forgets for a moment the dear dead, to weep for a father, who is more to be pitied than them. "Ah, my father! cries she, thou art a perfect model of misery; other mortals share a portion of it, thou only bearest the whole weight." Then turning to Creon, she asks him what right he has to refuse a sepulchre to Polynices? Here follows a very warm debate between the princess and Creon. She declares, that although all Thebes should oppose her, yet she will bury her brother. "Bury thyself with him then," says the king. She intreats, she threatens, but all in vain; Creon is inflexible: he alledges the command of Eteocles, and the will of the Gods.

In order to comprehend how far the ancients carried their passion, if the term may be allowed, for the honour of a tomb in their native country, we need only read what the princess says in this scene, to obtain leave of the tyrant to bury her brother.

ANTIGONE. How darest thou point the laws against one who is dead?

CREON. It was Eteocles who pronounced the sentence; it is my part to execute it.

ANTIG. The sentence is unjust; it is unjust to pay any regard to it.

CREON. How! is it not just to maintain the laws?

ANTIG. Not when those laws are tyrannical.

CREON. Is it tyrannical to punish Polynices?

ANTIG. It is.

CREON. He was an enemy to his country.

ANTIG. Chance, and his own ill fortune, forced him to be so; and death is the consequence of it.

CREON. And the want of a tomb shall be his punishment.

ANTIG. He prosecuted a just claim.

CREON. He shall be punished for doing so. It is my will, and I ordain it.

ANTIG. And I will bury him, although all Thebes should oppose me.

CREON. Bury thyself with him then.

ANTIG. It will be my glory to suffer for my affection to my brother.

CREON. Guards, seize her, and bear her to the palace.

ANTIG. In vain dost thou attempt it; I will not quit this dear body.

CREON. I pardon these transports, in consideration of thy sex; but know it that is a decree of the Gods, which I am resolved to obey.

ANTIG. The Gods decree that the dead shall not be insulted.

CREON. It is their will, that not even a little dust should be cast over his body.

ANTIG. Alas, prince! I conjure thee, suffer me to bury my brother. Grant this request for the sake of Jocasta, thy sister, and my mother.

CREON. Fruitless intreaties! my resolution is fixed.

ANTIG. Permit me only to wash his body.

CREON. It must not be.

ANTIG. Let me but bind up his wounds.

CREON. No honours must be paid to a traitor.

ANTIG. Oh, my dear brother! I shall at least be allowed the satisfaction of embracing thee.

CREON. No, trouble not with this unseasonable mourning, the marriage with which I intend to honour thee.

ANTIG. With which thou wilt honour me, tyrant! dost thou think me base enough to espouse thy son?

CRE-

CREON. Interest and necessity will oblige thee to it.

ANTIG. The night which thou chusest for this marriage shall produce another Danaide.

CREON. Oh heaven, what insolence !

ANTIG. Yes, here I vow to pierce the breast of the husband whom wouldst force on me.

CREON. And why, ungrateful woman, dost thou disdain this marriage ?

ANTIG. That I may follow an unhappy father into banishment.

CREON. This ill-timed haughtiness degenerates into madness !

ANTIG. To die with him, if banishment is too little.

CREON. Well, go then ; I shall deliver my son from a fury.

(*He goes out.*)

OEDIPUS. My daughter, I admire this excess of tenderness ; but----

ANTIG. How ! shall I espouse the son of a tyrant, and abandon the best of fathers ?

OEDIPUS. Live happy, Antigone ; I can support my miseries alone.

ANTIG. And who will take care of thy life ?

OEDIPUS. I wait only for death, in whatever place it shall please the Gods to offer it to me.

ANTIG. Pardon me, my father ; but in thee I no longer know that Oedipus who confounded the Sphinx.

OEDIPUS. Nor am I longer he ; that day which crowned him with success, caused all my misfortunes.

ANTIG. And shall his daughter see them and not partake them with him.

OEDIPUS. How disgraceful will it be for a princess to attend a miserable blind father, banished from his country !

ANTIG. A haughty princess may think so, a daughter will have different sentiments.

OEDIPUS. Well, be it so then ; lead me to thy mother : let us take a last farewell of her.

ANTIG. Here she is ; touch this dear hand for the last time.

OEDIPUS. Oh mother ! oh wretched wife !

ANTIG. All miseries were heaped upon her, death has completed them.

OEDIPUS. Where are my sons ?

An-

ANTIG. Here they lie, close to each other.

OEDIPUS. Guide my trembling hand to their faces.

ANTIG. Indulge thy tenderness, for sons who are now no more.

OEDIPUS. Oh! ye still dear remains, oh wretched children of a most wretched father!

ANTIG. Adieu, my dear Polynices, be witness of my affection, and the sacrifice I make to thee.

OEDIPUS. Daughter, the oracle of Apollo is accomplished.

ANTIG. Hast thou then any new misfortunes to acquaint me with?

OEDIPUS. I shall die an exile at Athens.

ANTIG. At Athens! will Athens then dare to receive Oedipus?

OEDIPUS. Colona, the sacred dwelling of Neptune, will receive me; there I shall find an asylum, and a tomb. Let us go then my generous daughter, since thou art resolved to be the companion of my banishment, and guide my doubtful steps.

The rest is written with a simplicity which the Greeks delighted in; but which would shock a modern reader. Oedipus asks for his staff, Antigone gives it him, and marks the place where he must fix it at each step, lest he should stumble. They both, after some pathetic reflections on their former happiness, and their present misery, which increase the compassion of the audience, retire to go into banishment, and the tragedy concludes.

This piece is crowded with incidents, but all leading to the same end: it is an assemblage of the misfortunes of Oedipus and his family. The poet has brought them together, to give greater scope for the passions of terror and pity, which he aimed at exciting. The last act would seem superfluous, like that of the Ajax of Sophocles, if we did not remember, that to be denied the honours of a funeral, was to the ancients a punishment more dreadful than death itself. Thus the death of their tragic heroes was not a sufficient catastrophe; the action could only be finished by the grant, or refusal of a sepulchre. I shall say nothing of other faults, which the reader may either condemn or excuse, according as he is more or less prejudiced against the manner of the ancients. I have given a faithful analysis of this piece; so that what defects it has may be easily discovered: but there are some things in the manners which cannot be relished.

Eteocles is indeed criminal by his injustice, and his ambition; and Polynices, although a much more amiable character, is not altogether innocent, since he waged war against his native country.

The

The evident injustice of his brother, which forced him upon it, is not a sufficient excuse for him ; and this is one of those delicate situations so proper to engage the attention, and interest the passions. But these brothers, although they had committed no other crimes, yet contract a great share of guilt by confining Oedipus in an obscure apartment of the palace ; because the respect they owed to a father ought to have prevailed over every other consideration, and even over the shame and reproach they were apprehensive of, which were their only motives for this treatment of him.

But what can be said for Oedipus, Jocasta, and Antigone, who are guilty of involuntary crimes only, and yet are miserable ? what can be said for Creon, who in excuse for his excessive rigour, and to disguise his politic hatred, pleads an oracle delivered by Tiresias, and the dying commands of an usurper ? but that we must enter into these notions, and these manners which appear so strange to us ; and this cannot always be done, on account of the remoteness of times, and difference of ideas. For, as in matters that relate to amusement, and depend upon taste, the first impression is very strong, and instantly turns to prejudice ; it is therefore natural to be shocked with ideas which appear singular ; and which on that account lose the charms that formerly made so strong an impression upon the mind. However, this piece obtained the prize upon the Athenian stage.

That we may gain a full knowledge of the difference between the taste of Greece and that of other ages, we must not omit here the Thebaid of Seneca, although more than half of it is lost ; nor that of Racine, tho' one of his worst tragedies ; nor even that of Dolce, notwithstanding it is translated from the Greek, and one part of Rotrou's, the reader having already seen the other.

THE
T H E B A I D,

A

T R A G E D Y O F S E N E C A.

THIS piece is come down to us in so mutilated a state, and the plan Seneca pursues is so different from that of Euripides, that I can say but very little for it. If this plan was natural at least, we might by the help of conjecture, as with Ariadne's clue, discover its intricacies; but we well know that to be natural was not the manner of Seneca. He follows the impulse of his own fiery imagination, whenever it leads him from the right to the left; from black to white. There are some precious remains of ancient statues, as for example bare trunks only, which by their situation, a skilful statuary would guess with probability enough, what heroes, or what Gods, those statues when entire, represented, and in what attitudes; but it is difficult to venture at any conjecture with regard to Seneca's Thebaid; besides, what we have left of it, is filled with such extravagant rant, to give it its true name, that to seek for any connexion or order, would be fruitless trouble. After what we have seen of the tragedies of Seneca, I shall be excused for this severe criticism upon him.

A C T I.

All that we have remaining of the first act is one scene between Oedipus and Antigone*; in which there are above three hundred verses; but not more than seven or eight of these are to the purpose, or lead to the subject of the tragedy. Oedipus, blind, appears with his daughter: we do not immediately know why he is introduced, but by degrees he discovers that he is resolved to go

* It is evident, in my opinion, by the extent of other Latin tragedies, that there is only a few verses, and the ode of the Chorus wanting to this act.

into

into a voluntary banishment; and to abandon himself wholly to his despair. One would imagine, by the situation in which he is shewn, and by the excess of his grief, that he had but very lately discovered himself to be the husband of his mother; otherwise his transports would be altogether inexcusable: for grief, when mellowed by time, expresses itself more nobly, and with a decent calmness. However, it must at least be three or four years since he came to the knowledge of his misfortunes. Oedipus is determined to die at any rate; he seeks the means, and this in a manner so ridiculous, that after having in vain requested of his affectionate daughter either steel, poison, or that she will lead him to the top of some precipice, he concludes that he ought to have recourse to his own hands; which in an apostrophe he exhorts to serve him faithfully. But his greatest perplexity is, to determine what part of him he shall first wound, "For, says he, all of me is guilty."

" Totus nocens sum; quâ voles mortem exige
" Effringe corpus, &c."

" Begin then, my arm, wherever thou wilt; pierce this body
" with a thousand wounds; tear out this heart; mangle these
" entrails." Thus he goes on, and concludes at length to begin
with his head; having already torn out his eyes. Certainly all
this is very pathetic! Oh Grecian simplicity! what art thou be-
come, under the pen of this Latin wit?

Oedipus at last repeats all the crimes he has committed, the remembrance of which, and the grief and remorse he feels for them, force him to desire death, and ends with slightly mentioning that misfortune which is nevertheless the subject of the tragedy: namely, the cruel dissension between his two sons, who were competitors for the throne. He tells us, that one refused to resign it, and the other comes with an army to claim it. Antigone takes occasion from this to intreat that Oedipus will live to restore peace to the state, and to reconcile his sons. We cannot know whether he grants or denies her request, for the rest of this act is lost; however, we shall soon see this prince appear again upon the scene.

The first thought that offers itself to the mind, after reading Euripides, is, that the Latin poet was desirous of imitating the Greek one, in the scene where Oedipus appears; but it is very plain that he has spoiled it; and that of an excellent one, he has made a very bad one, by misplacing it, and by the heightenings he has attempted to give it. Euripides makes Oedipus come out of his

prison to be witness of the dreadful chastisements of heaven upon his sons ; and to have his miseries aggravated by a shameful banishment. In this situation Oedipus may and ought to give vent to his griefs, which he does with becoming majesty ; but the Latin poet opens the scene with the furious transports of this prince, without giving him any new subject for these transports, if it be not, that at the close of them he mentions the division between his sons, which he knew before, and of which he was perhaps the cause, by his imprecations. After all, it must be confessed, that these wild sallies are expressed in the finest verses imaginable.

A C T II.

There are but forty verses of this act preserved. We only see an officer, who comes to inform Oedipus that Polynices has laid siege to Thebes, with an Argive army ; and he intreats him to ward off this tempest from the city. " Who I ! " answers the prince. " am I a man to hinder crimes, and withhold a barbarous hand " from shedding kindred blood ? No no, my sons do not degenerate " from their father ; I know them by these deeds."

" Me nunc sequuntur, laudo & agnosco lubens."

He does more, he exhorts them to shew themselves worthy of such a father.

" Exhortor aliquid ut patre hoe dignum gerant."

This figure is pushed very far, according to Seneca's manner ; for, in effect, the father animates his sons, as if they were present, to murder each other.

" Agite, O propago clara, generosam indolem
" Probate factis, &c.

" Frater in fratrem ruat, &c."

This is a very uncommon representation of despair ; and in this conjuncture it would be beautiful if it was not extravagant.

A C T III.

Jocasta enters, to declaim in this act as Oedipus had done in the first. In this lies Seneca's power ; all his principal characters are orators. The queen is doubtful for which of her sons her heart ought to declare itself ; for Polynices or for Eteocles ? Both are her sons. One claims his right, but claims it at the head of an army,

army, which he leads against his country : the other is no less dear to her than his brother ; yet the balance leans towards the former, whose cause is the justest, and who is the most oppressed ; and she says, like Sabina, the wife of Horace, in Corneille's tragedy :

“ Je serai du parti qu'affligerá le fort.”

*Quó causa melior forsque deterior trabit
Inclinat animus semper infirmo favens.*

Corneille had certainly this scene of the Latin tragedy in view when he composed that speech for Sabina ; and the wonder is, that Seneca should have formed a Corneille, as Euripides has a Racine.

An officer interrupts the queen, to tell her that the two armies are upon the point of engaging, if she does not use some endeavours to reconcile her sons. Jocasta answers, that she will go; but instead of hastening to prevent the battle, she continues upon the stage to speak some fine lines which Seneca was resolved not to lose. Antigone again intreats her not to delay; and then Jocasta remembering that she has been already pressed to depart ; and that there is not a moment to lose, wishes to be carried by the winds, or that some griffin would bear her on his wings, that she may the sooner reach the camp. Accordingly she runs off like a mad woman, at least the officer tells us so, very plainly.

“ Vadit furenti similis, aut etiam furit.”

He even makes five or six unseasonable comparisons, to illustrate his thought. Seven or eight lines follow next, which are absolutely unintelligible ; and which are apparently out of place, and put here by chance : for the same officer, when he has told us that Jocasta flew away like a Bacchanal, adds immediately afterwards (and unfortunately the verses seem connected) that Jocasta had arrived in the middle of the two armies; that she separated them instantly; that the brothers, who were ready to engage in fight, held their javelins suspended ; and that they talked of peace; and other circumstances of the like nature, which we are sure he could not be so soon informed of, especially since she was not transported through the air as she wished to be ; and that the officer was not suddenly taken up to the top of a high tower to see all that he relates. After all, however connected this may seem by the disposition of the verses, it is so little by the sense,

that it would be unjust to decide absolutely upon a piece which is evidently mutilated; and of which we have very few fragments remaining.

A C T IV.

The fifth act of this tragedy is wanting; and the fourth is not more entire or more intelligible than the preceding ones, although the verses follow one another in their natural order.

Jocasta appears here between her two sons; at least she speaks to both as if they were present; but there is only one who answers, which is Polynices. The queen bids him embrace his brother; he refuses. "Wilt thou not trust to my faith," says she? "No," replies Polynices. This is a harsh compliment, although tortured into a thought which is designed to be extremely witty.

"Timeo: nihil jam jura naturæ valent.

"Post ista fratrum exempla, ne matri quidem,

"Fides habenda est."

"I fear, and my fear is too well founded. Here nature loses her rights; and after an example of such cruel enmity between brothers, how can one confide even in a mother?"

The queen in vain exhorts him to throw off his armour, and this she does by enumerating each part of it. But Polynices is obstinate. Jocasta then turns to Eteocles, and endeavours to obtain the same request of him, but at first without success. She afterwards makes a long speech, as different from that in Euripides as the whole scene is: that is to say, it is pompous, swelling, and not in the least affecting. Polynices answers her; but Eteocles, as I have before observed, says not a word: this long silence is surprising enough. As for Polynices, he declares that he will reign, cost what it will; and he no otherwise preserves any part of the character Euripides, gives him. But that the reader may be better able to form a judgment of this piece, I have given the sense and the conduct of all that remains of the fourth act, which is undoubtedly the least exceptionable, and the best supported of any in the play, as well by the dignity of some of the sentiments, as by the beauty of the versification.

JOCASTA. Turn upon me this hostile steel, and these flames with which you threaten your country. Let both armies fall only on Jocasta; enemy or citizen, it matters not, both ought to plunge their swords into that body which has given brothers to her husband. Pierce this breast, scatter these mangled limbs, for I am the

mo-

mother of Polynices and Eteocles: yet give me your hands while they are still innocent; a fatal error makes you guilty in spite of yourselves. Hitherto it is the crime of fortune, and this day you see the horrors of it. You are yet at liberty to chuse or to reject it. Oh! if filial piety has yet a place in your hearts, grant me the peace I implore of you? If crimes only can please you, a greater than any you have yet committed must ensue. I come to oppose this crime; but which of you shall I intreat? which shall I first embrace? my tenderness is divided between them. One has been absent; and if their former agreement were to take place, the other would soon be so. It is only then by war that your mother can behold you together! Come near, Polynices, the miseries thou hast suffered in banishment render thee dearer to a mother; come near, my son, but first sheath that cruel sword; fix that javelin in the earth, which is impatient to dart from thy hand. This shield opposes my embrace, oh quit it! lay aside thy helmet, and shew thyself to thy mother. Why dost thou turn aside thy eyes? why so anxiously view the posture and the arm of Eteocles? I will be thy shield, my son, his sword shall not shed thy blood, till it has first drawn mine. Why this irresolution? canst thou not trust thy mother?

POLYNICES. Yes, I acknowledge I fear all: nature here loses her rights. After an example of such cruel enmity between brothers, can I with prudence even trust a mother?

JOCASTA. Well then, resume thy sword, thy helmet, and thy armour, while thy brother lays down his. Eteocles, thou wert the cause of this war, it is thy part to disarm thyself first.

“ Tu pone ferrum, causa qui es ferri prior.”

Oh, if the rage of fight possesses you, I ask but one short interval, one moment to embrace a son returned from a long exile! suffer me to embrace him for the first, or for the last time. At least lay aside your arms while I implore peace of you. Alas! you fear each other, and I fear you both; but it is only for yourselves. Polynices, why dost thou refuse to quit this steel? enjoy the truce, it depends on thee. The battle which you both so eagerly desire, will render victory shameful, and a defeat glorious. Thou art afraid of being taken at a disadvantage by thy brother! Ah, when treachery and crimes are to be committed, be rather the victim than the author of them: but fear nothing, thy mother will be surety for both. Will you then, my sons, give me cause to envy the blindness

ness of your father, which hides these horrors from him: am I here to dissuade you from a crime, or to view it nearer?

Eteocles has laid down his arms: Ah, Polynices, it is thou then to whom I must address my prayers, or rather my tears!* I see thee again; I see thee, alas! after so many ardent prayers to see thee. Thou art then allied to a foreign king! how many seas, how many dangers have been witnesses of thy flight! Thy mother has not presided at thy marriage, nor adorned thy palace; nor wreathed the hymenial torches! The father of thy bride, instead of treasures, instead of territories, gives thee war for a portion with her: the son-in-law of an enemy, far removed from thy native country; refused in a foreign kingdom; thy own unjustly withheld from thee; banished without guilt; all thou wantedst to make thee wretched, as Oedipus's was a criminal marriage; and that thou hast completed. Oh, my son, whom I see again, after so long an absence! Oh, my Polynices! the hope and fear of a fond mother: thou whom I have so often implored the Gods, that I might behold again: thou, whose return may be as fatal to me as it was welcome. When shall I cease, cried I, to tremble for him? thou wilt fear for thyself, answered the Gods, when thou seest him again. Alas! it is too true, Polynices, and war arrive together. Oh, my son! turn aside this sword from thy native country, while it is not yet wholly criminal: too much guilt has it already incurred, by its approach. Alas! my blood freezes in my veins when I behold my sons so near the brink of a dreadful precipice. Ah! what is the crime I expect to see thee commit? One far more impious than that which thy unhappy father was not able to foresee. No, I will not any longer fear that thou wilt commit it. I will not see it; but I am miserable in having lived so long as to be apprehensive that I shall see it.

My dear son, I conjure thee by this womb which gave thee birth; after such agonizing pains; by thy sisters filial piety; by the face of thy innocent father, which his own hands has so cruelly mangled; I conjure thee to spare thy country the flames with which thou threatenest it, and turn back these fatal colours: even thy retreat will not prevent some part of thy meditated crime from being committed. Thebes has already beheld her fields covered with hostile bands; she has seen her meadows trampled by the

* It is probable that Polynices raises here the vizor of his helmet at least; the text gives us to understand as much.

feet of furious steeds; she has seen thy warriors rolling over them in their chariots; she has seen torches kindled to reduce our houses to ashes ; and what was never heard of before, even in Thebes, she has seen two brothers ready to destroy each other by the sword. The Theban army, the whole people, thy sisters, and even thy mother, have been witnesses of these horrors. Oedipus indeed may thank his despair for having escaped a sight so miserable. Oh, let this name remind thee, that in the judgment of thy father, error itself ought not to remain unpunished ! Be warned then, I conjure thee, and do not overthrow thy country ; destroy not a throne which thou wishest to ascend. Reflect a moment upon the blindness of thy rage : thou claimest a right to reign over this kingdom ; and thou wouldest lay it in ruins. Thou wouldest possess it, and yet thou wouldest annihilate it. To be thine it must cease to be. Thy conduct hurts thy cause. Wouldst thou not spread desolation over her, like an enemy ? destroy her city, burn her fruitful fields, put all her inhabitants to flight ? Ah, Thebes cannot belong to thee ! for no one would lay waste his own territories. Thou canst not consider this country as thy own, against which thou bringest sword and flames. Suffer the state to subside, and then demand which of you shall reign over it.

But canst thou, my son, canst thou support the sight of Thebes reduced to ashes ? What ! these towers of Amphion, not raised by the painful labours of human hands, but by the powerful harmony of the lyre, which even stones obey ; wouldest thou have the cruelty to overthrow them ? to carry away the spoils of Thebes, and load with fetters the kindred of Oedipus ? to force her matrons from the arms of their husbands ? to confine her beauteous virgins in prison, that they may be presented as slaves to the young brides of Argos ? and I who am thy mother, in shameful bonds, enhance the triumph of a brother over his brother ? Wouldst thou dare to introduce the enemy into a city which ought to be so dear to thee ? wouldest thou put all to fire and sword, and with this brutal rage expect to be a king ? of what value would the sceptre be then ? Oh, listen, my son, to the counsel of thy mother ! suppress this inhuman ambition, and obey the dictates of piety.

POLYNICES. What ! me wouldest thou have to fly, and still continue to lead a wandering life, far from my native country, meanly imploring succours and support from strangers ? Could I be worse treated if I had been perjured, and a traitor ? shall I bear the punishment of another's treachery, while he enjoys the advantages
of

of it? but thou commandest me to be gone; should I obey, what term dost thou prescribe to my exile? where wouldst thou that I should fix my abode? shall my brother possess my palace, while I think myself happy to be confined to any cottage which he will deign to offer me; for this surely you cannot deny me? I may at least expect an humble retreat instead of the throne, which thou wouldst deprive me of. Reduced to this miserable condition, a vile slave, and not so much a husband as a subject, how can I follow Adraustus to his kingdom? No, mother, to fall from a throne to slavery, is what I cannot bear.

JOCASTA. If nothing but a throne will content thee, and if thy hand must weild a sceptre, weighty as it is, the universe will afford thee a thousand.

Here the poet makes a geographical enumeration of kingdoms, which is puerile enough in Latin, but would be worse in French. Jocasta continues thus:

Go, conquer these kingdoms, lead thither Adraustus and his army; let him put thee in possession of these crowns: as for the crown of Thebes, be assured it is still thy father's. Banishment is better than such a return; thy banishment is the crime of another; thy return will be thy own crime. Thy forces more usefully employed in other conquests, will procure thee sceptres unsullied with guilt: thy brother, no longer thy competitor, will be the first to fight for thee. Go then, and engage in enterprises which a father and a mother may second with their prayers. A sceptre obtained by a crime is worse than exile. Reflect upon the miseries and the vicissitudes of war. In vain art thou followed by all the forces of Greece; in vain dost thou display thy innumerable troops, the fate of arms is always doubtful, to rivals for dominion. The sword seems equal, but it is fortune that decides our hopes and fears. The crime is certain, the success of it is not so. Should I beseech the Gods to grant thy desires, thou wouldst banish them from Thebes; her citizens would be massacred; the enemy would become masters of thy country; thou wouldst subdue thy brother, and triumph; but what a triumph is that which the conqueror cannot enjoy without rendering himself hateful! Alas! even he whom thou so ardently desirest to conquer, when conquered, thou wouldst mourn for. Oh then, my son, quit this fatal design! deliver thy country from fear, and thy family from anxiety and grief.

POLYNICES. What! shall not then my guilty brother be punished for his treachery?

JOCASTA. Believe me he will be too severely punished; he will reign.

POLYNICES. Is this the punishment thou reservest for him?

JOCASTA. That it is a punishment believe thy grand-father; believe thy father. Cadmus and his whole race will teach thee that it is one. Not one of them wore the crown with impunity, although they were not perjured. Number Eteocles among these unhappy kings.

POLYNICES. I do, and I think his destiny too glorious to perish in the rank of monarchs.

JOCASTA. I place thee but in the rank of exiles, be hated then, and reign on that condition.

POLYNICES. Be it so. He who fears to be hated is not desirous to reign. The creator of the world has made these two things inseparable, hatred and empire. A king and a hero will suffer hatred. And what is it that procures a monarch the love of his people? He stays his hand and checks his power: he has more power when he is hated. He who would gain affection may hold the scepter in a passive hand.

JOCASTA.* The king that is hated by his people never sways the scepter long; but it belongs to kings to give rules of policy and government. Dost thou give rules to exiles?

Polynices answers this subtlety, which is very obscure, as well as many other passages, only by declaring that he will sacrifice every thing to obtain the crown: he will give up his country, his palace, and even his wife to the flames.

“ Pro regno velim

“ Patriam, penates, conjugem flammis dare.

“ Imperia pretio quolibet constant bene.”

The rest is wanting. What we have just read will be approved or disapproved according to the different tastes among men. I have endeavoured to translate this author without burlesquing him, a manner of translating which is but too common. I have been more faithful to his sense than to his pointed turn of wit. There are however some beauties to be found in this piece; but they are not beauties in the taste of Grecian simplicity: such as are struck

* Notwithstanding these lines are thus placed in some editions, there are manuscripts which give them to Jocasta; and in-

with the glare of wit will here find wherewithal to gratify themselves; but those who would examine closely the strength of reasoning, and the conduct of the passions, will not be equally pleased. But in order to satisfy these different critics, I shall give them the thoughts of Justus Lipsius, and Daniel Heinsius, upon the Latin Thebaid.

* Justus Lipsius, in his observations upon the Latin tragedies, takes great pains to discover who are the authors of them. He pretends to have found three or even four. He gives the Medea to the true Seneca, who lived in the time of the Emperor Claudius. Many other pieces, as the Hercules Mad, to a Seneca in the reign of Trajan. As for the Thebaid, this is his opinion of it: that it was written by an author, whose name he is not able to discover, but whom he thinks worthy of the age of Augustus. He would, he says, if he durst, decide this question; however, he is of opinion, that he may safely pronounce this piece to be greatly superior to the others. "The economy of it, continues he, is very different from all the rest: It has no Chorus, it suffers no interruption, it is written uniformly, the poetry every where equal, and the whole piece is grand, sublime, and truly worthy of the buskin. There is nothing puerile in it; nothing strained or affected; the sentences wonderful fine; not studiously introduced, but strong, nervous, and to me they appear so striking, that they not only animate me, but lift me as it were out of myself. Can any of the others produce such an effect? I will venture to pronounce that it is a composition of the Augustan age: from the choice of the subject, and some verses which seem to be expressly inserted in it, I suspect that it was written during the civil wars; however that may be, it deserves to be particularly distinguished; and that it should be no longer prophaned by the breath of the ignorant vulgar. Yield then, ye critics, and no longer scruple to rank this piece among the best compositions of the Romans."

† Let us now hear Heinsius; he gives the ten tragedies to five Latin authors. The Hippolitus, the Trojan Captives, and Medea, to Lucius Anneus Seneca, the Philosopher; Hercules distracted, Thyestes, Oedipus, Agamemnon, to Marcus Annæus Seneca, a relation of the other Seneca. The others, that is to say, the Thebaid, Hercules on mount Oeta, and Octavia, to several unknown

* I Lipsii animadvers. in Tragæd. quo L. necæ ac reliquorum quæ extant Tragedi, Anneo Senecæ tribuunter.

† Dan. Heinsii in L. & M. Annæi Sc.

claimers. "The Thebaid, says he, is a piece of that kind; it is
"wholly unworthy of the praises which a learned writer has be-
"stowed on it" (he means Justus Lipsius.) Heinsius, after this be-
ginning, falls upon the title Thebaid, which he thinks is impro-
perly chosen. This is mere cavelling; but when he descends to
a minute examination of this piece, he argues with more solidity.
He says, that it is a tragedy composed of the faults of the Greek
poet, without one of those beauties which he might have taken
from him. He condemns the exposition of the subject by Oedipus
as trifling; the first scene of Jocasta as ridiculous, and all the rest
as absurd. "His little sentences, says he, chalk up the sentiments
"he labours to produce. His periods, and some of his sen-
"timents, which seem tolerably good, sink into nothing at last.
"The style does not in the least resemble that of Seneca the Phi-
"losopher; nor is it equal to that of the Trojan Captive, the Me-
"dea, or Hyppolitus. Those who will have this piece to be
"written in the Augustan age give us only their own authority in
"support of this opinion; and it is not likely that their discern-
"ment and their taste should be readily submitted to, when they
"fail in all the rest. It must be observed also, that as Eschylus
"and Sophocles take care to insinuate through all their writings
"that they are Pythagoreans, so we find this sort of claimers
"affecting to give themselves the varnish of Stoicism. There are
"many strokes of it in the Thebaid, such as that hackneyed one
"which the Stoicks make use of so ostentatiously to exalt the in-
"flexible constancy of their master; and which Antigone thus
"expresses: Yes, my father, thou oughtest to look upon thyself
"as guiltless; and so much the more innocent as thou art so in
"spite of the Gods. We may find many such in Seneca the
"Philosopher; and this it is which the celebratred Justus Lipsius
"alludes to, who was a great lover of the Stoicks."

I have delivered the opinions thus opposite of two able men, that
I may give an example of the diversity of judgments in matters of
taste; but this diversity never broke out with respect to the wri-
tings of the Greeks, nor the best writings of the Romans. It is
the laboured and glittering style which has produced adversaries
and defenders; it never happened before the appearance of this
style, that simplicity and sentiment became so highly valued. This
contention has risen higher as there was more or less taste for
simplicity and plain sense: the sparkling writers of the same age
have been compared to one another; as for example, the Latin

tragedies of which we are now speaking; and, according to the comparison, every one in his own way has thought it proper to distinguish authors and ages, and the more because in reality these tragedies are not all written with the same degree of strength, though they have all some resemblance in the style and manner of thinking.

The question is, whether this style and this manner of thinking which are common to them all, be equal to the turn and style of the Greeks? And this I think cannot be allowed, although our theatre, with all the pomp with which Corneille has adorned it, owes the heighth to which he has raised it to Lucan and Seneca; although it be greatly superior, if you will, to the theatre of the Greeks, yet it is more than probable, that as long as there is any taste remaining for what is just and natural, the Greek tragedies will always claim the superiority, and will please more than all the tinsel of Seneca, and of such of his imitators who have not the genius of a Corneille.

ANTIG-

A N T I G O N E,

A

T R A G E D Y B Y R O T R O U.

IN the Antigone of Sophocles, we have seen part of that of Rotrou. From the third scene of the third act to the end, it is Sophocles's tragedy; and the beginning is a slight imitation of the Phenicians of Euripides, or rather of the Thebaid of Seneca; for Rotrou is not so close a copier in the first part of his Antigone as in the second. Racine has justly observed, that Rotrou's Antigone, although very faulty, on account of this duplicity of action, is nevertheless full of fine passages. It is necessary that we should examine the plan and conduct of this piece.

A C T I.

Jocasta is represented at her toilet dressing herself at day-break, that she may fly to Eteocles, and interrupt the battle between the two armies, which unknown to her have been engaged some hours. While she is preparing to go, Antigone and her sister enter, and give the queen an account of the death of Meneceus, who they tell her had sacrificed himself for the public good. Thus is the episode of Euripides thrown into narration, where it appears as at a distance, and has no great effect. And indeed this poet was under a necessity of crowding his incidents very close together, since he was resolved to swell his tragedy with so great a number.

Eteocles enters immediately afterwards, to give a circumstantial account of the battle, which had proved equally fatal to both parties: he also relates some particulars of the death of Meneceus. Creon, who is present, throws out some impious expressions against the Gods, and some injurious ones to the king, who excuses them in consideration of the grief of a father deprived of a son whom he tenderly loved. Eteocles afterwards retires to hold a council; to which he takes with him all the lords that attended him, except

cept Hemon, who remains alone with Antigone his mistress. This is the first time they see each other after a year's absence; for Hemon had followed the fortune of Polynices, Antigone's favourite brother. The conversation therefore turns upon this prince, whose rage Antigone flatters herself she shall be able to allay, and put an end to the war. However, the two lovers draw only unfavourable presages concerning this peace, and the interests of their love. They are interrupted by a page sent from Eteocles, to summon Hemon to the council, who had only staid behind to have a moment's private conversation with his mistress, after so long an absence.

All these objects, which pass before the eyes of the audience, almost as rapidly as I represent them here, have the fault of being extremely precipitated; yet even in this precipitation there is a singular grace, since the subject is explained in each scene, and in a manner so much the more interesting as that each actor appearing on a sudden after the other, acquaints us with something new. Thus all the past events and present interests are unfolded more naturally than as the usual way is by confidants; an artifice often necessary, but almost always cold and unaffected.

Notwithstanding this rapidity of Rotrou, we are yet but in the middle of the first act; and here the scene is broken: for the audience who were at first in the apartment of Jocasta, where, as I have observed, the subject is thus far explained, must now transport themselves to the Grecian camp, without the Theban walls, and in the tent of Polynices. There we see this prince between Argia his wife, and king Adraustus, his father-in-law: he reproaches himself with the blood his allies have shed in his quarrel, and determines to challenge his brother to a single combat. Adraustus and Argia tremble at the thought.

“ADRAST. Dieux, que proposez-vous? quelle horrible avantage!

“ARGIE. Hé, Monsieur, écoutez-la voix de la nature:

“Songez quel est le sang que vous voulez verser.

“Sans honte & sans frayeur pouvez-vous y penser?

“POLYN. La chose est résolue, & la nature même

“Souscrit à cet arrêt de ma furur extrême, &c.”

Adraustus insists upon his laying aside such a resolution: he even offers to resign the throne of Argos to him; but Polynices declares he should blush to owe a scepter to the fondness of a wife and the bounty of a father-in-law. He is resolved to purchase it by his sword; and besides, he is less provoked at the usurpation of his crown

crown than at his brother's baseness in violating his faith, and the unnatural hatred he bears him. He embraces Argia, and recommends her to Adraustus, as he does likewise the care of burying him if he should perish in this combat: he then forces himself away from them in spite of all their intreaties, and the act concludes.

A C T II.

In the second act the spectator finds himself at the foot of the Theban towers, where Polynices, with his sword in his hand, after having thrown his defiance within the walls, calls fiercely upon his brother to appear, and charges him with cowardice for his long delay. The Argive chiefs in vain endeavour to stop Polynices: he answers,

“*Laissez juger les Dieux; ne soyez que témoins.*”

Rotrou, as is easy to perceive, does the very contrary of Euripides, who, in contrasting the characters of the two brothers, gives more insolence and rage to Eteocles, and more gentleness and moderation to Polynices. Here it is Polynices who is haughty, revengeful, and inexorable. Eteocles is a far less odious character. In this the French poet has not succeeded any more than Racine, who imitated him; but this is not all. They represent Eteocles as beloved by the people; so that he reigns in some sort in spite of himself: at least he has this plausible excuse for not resigning the crown; whereas Polynices is looked upon and feared as a tyrant, a prejudice which produces no pity for him. In Euripides we lament his fate, in the two French tragedies we hate him.

This difference merits our consideration so much the more as that the situation in which Euripides places this prince is more unhappy than criminal. His scepter is unjustly withheld from him; he uses means to recover it, and has not recourse to arms till the last extremity. He is cruelly injured, and dragged reluctantly, if we may be allowed the expression, to the precipice; and yet his misfortunes are punished as if they were crimes, since he loses his life, and is even after his death treated like a criminal. He is such a hero as tragedy requires; but if we deprive him of this advantage, if we make a tyrant of him, a barbarian, the enemy of his brother and his country, the spectators have no longer any tears to bestow on him, and he deserves his fate. Besides, what hero shall we substitute in his place? shall it be Eteocles, a prince indeed somewhat less odious

ous, but an usurper ; and for that reason less likely to move the compassion than the detestation of the audience. It is Seneca who first taught us to disfigure Polynices, and unhappily the French poets have chosen to follow him rather than Euripides.

But to return : Antigone appears upon the walls of Thebes ; and seeing Polynices again for the first time since his banishment, she makes him a very affecting speech, to dissuade him from his fatal design.

“ Polynice, avancez ; portez ici la vüë,
 “ Souffrez qu’après un an votre sœur vous saluë.
 “ Malheureuse ! hé pourquoi ne le puis-je autrement ?
 “ Quel Destin entre nous met cet éloignement ?
 “ Après un si long-tems la sœur revoit son frere,
 “ Et ne lui peut donner le salut ordinaire :
 “ Un seul embrassement ne nous est pas permis ;
 “ Nous parlons séparés comme deux ennemis.
 “ Hé, mon frere, à quoi bon cet appareil de guerre ?
 “ A quoi ces pavillons sur votre propre terre ?
 “ Contre quel ennemi vous êtes vous armé ?
 “ Ne trembleriez-vous pas, si je l’avois nommé, &c.
 “ Encore à la nature Eteocle défere ;
 “ Il se laisse gagner aux plaintes d’une mere :
 “ Il n’a pas dépouillé tous sentimens humains,
 “ Et le fer est tout prêt à tomber de ses mains :
 “ Et vous plus inhumain & plus inaccessible,
 “ Conservez contre moi le titre d’invincible,
 “ Moi, dont, &c.”

The rest is equally strong, but Polynices has already taken his resolution : he cannot be disarmed even by a sister, whom he tenderly loves, unless she will resolve to plunge his sword into his own bosom ; this he will consent to, but he will never consent to live, and not be revenged on his brother.

That instant Eteocles flings himself and accepts the challenge. Ashamed at having appeared so late, he is eager for the combat, and says,

“ Que le champ du combat en soit aussi le prix.”

After this short and spirited scene, Jocasta enters and throws herself between her two sons. Creon takes offence at this action and betrays by a single word that cruel ambition which incites him to wish

wish the two brothers may kill each other, that the throne may be left vacant for him. Racine has given Creon the same character. In Rotrou, Jocasta plays the same part as in Seneca. She commands her sons to embrace; they behold each other with eyes sparkling with rage. Polynices insults Jocasta by the suspicion he conceives of her: this fault Rotrou was led into by imitating Seneca; but in other respects he has improved upon him. See, among many others, the following four beautiful lines:

“ Car quelle est cette guerre & quels sont ses objets ?

“ Vos parens, vos amis, vos pays, vos sujets.

“ C'est ce qu'on peut nommer votre parti contraire :

“ De ce funeste hymen nous sommes le douaire.”

for Polynices had espoused the daughter of an enemy of Thebes. The two brothers break into mutual rage, and provoke each other by reproaches and threats. Jocasta, to appease them, proposes to Polynices conquests more worthy of him than that of Thebes. Speaking of Eteocles, she says,

“ Mais quoi, son règne plaît; le vôtre est redouté.

“ POLYN. Il a gagné les cœurs. Et moi moins populaire

“ Je tiens indifférent d'être crain ou de plaire.

“ Qui régne aimé des siens en est moins absolu, &c.”

The queen, enraged to find that her ungrateful sons pay no regard to her tears and intreaties, quits them with these words,

“ Adieu, non plus mes fils, mais odieuses pestes,

“ Et détestables fruits de meurtres & d'incestes,

“ Vous ne mourrez pas seuls, & je suivrai vos pas,

“ Pour vous persécuter même après le trépas.”

Heimon and the Argive chiefs use fruitless endeavours to dissuade Polynices from the combat, while on the other side Creon animates Eteocles by this line :

“ Vengez-nous, vengez-vous, & vengez vos sujets.

Eteocles indeed, notwithstanding the rage that possesses him, perceives the secret interest which suggests this language; he even goes so far as to reproach him with it; but the fault lies in the giving this character to Creon; and into this fault Racine also has fallen, who has copied Rotrou in one greater still, as we shall soon see.

The two brothers retire to chuse a proper place for the combat; that is, they retire that they may not be under the necessity of fighting before the audience: but if it be a fault to break the unity of place, it is also one to be obliged to give bad reasons for not exposing to the eyes of the spectator any thing which it is not fit he should see; for what hinders the two rivals from fighting in the very place where they appear with their swords drawn in their hands?

A C T III.

In this act we are transported to Antigone's apartment, where we hear this princess chaunt, if we may be allowed the expression, some stanzas on the occasion of Jocasta's death, who has killed herself. Racine has taken this turn, and has succeeded still worse; for he makes Antigone talk of love while the dead body of her mother lies before her. But Rotrou is not guilty of this indecorum, at least his stanzas turn upon fortune, which he loads with some poetical invectives.

Hemon enters to acquaint his mistress with the death of the two princes. This recital, which is an imitation of Euripides, has some strokes in it more beautiful than the original. Antigone continues some time like one stupified with grief; then recovering a little she shews Hemon the body of Jocasta. At length Ismena arrives, who puts the last hand to the grief and despair of her sister, by informing her of the new decree published by Creon, which prohibits any person from giving funeral honours to Polynices, under pain of being buried alive. Here a new order of incidents begins; I mean, we are now come to the tragedy of Sophocles, which makes the second part of Rotrou's: we have given an account of it in its place.

T H E

THE
THEBAID;
OR, THE
RIVAL BROTHERS.

A

TRAGEDY BY RACINE.

EVERY one knows that Racine made an apology for this play, which was written when he was very young ; and indeed it bears the marks of extreme youth, and is very different from those perfect pieces which his pen afterwards produced. Although he has slavishly followed Rotrou throughout the whole tragedy, yet it is not difficult to discover the hand of Racine in certain places which are touched with exquisite grace. This piece being much better known than that on which it is formed, it will be sufficient to give a short account of it here, to distinguish what parts of it are imitations of Seneca and Rotrou, and what are not. It is not to be doubted but if Racine had treated the subject of the Thebaid with as full a knowledge of the theatre as he had when he wrote his Iphigenia, and his Phedra, he would have followed the plan of Euripides : in proportion as he advanced, his own observations would have led him to preserve more simplicity in his subjects. This is the great advantage we acquire from experience and reflection; we perceive at length that the greatest effort of art, is to imitate nature as close as possible; and there is nothing so simple as nature herself.

A C T I.

The first scene is almost the same with that of Rotrou, except that Racine does not place Jocasta at her toilet. Among other fine lines which the queen addresses to the sun in speaking of the two princes, she says,

E e e 2

" Tu

“ Tu sc̄ais qu’ils sont sortis d’un sang incestueux,
“ Et tu t’étonnerois de les voir vertueux.

Antigone, who has been sent for, enters; and Jocasta prepares to go with her to the camp, to separate the brothers. This is also copied from Rotrou. Eteocles enters, as in the former poet, and Jocasta falls almost fainting into the arms of her attendants, at the sight of some blood which appears upon his robe.

“ Est-ce le sang d’un fr̄ere, ou n’est-ce point le vôtre.”

Eteocles, after removing her fears, by acquainting her that there had been a skirmish between some of the Theban soldiers, and a party of the enemy, which he had put an end to, endeavours to justify his conduct, and his motives for giving battle to the Argive army. Thebes, he says, desires to have him for her king, and rejects Polynices. Jocasta however prevails upon him to consent to a truce, and an interview with Polynices. Creon appears, and betrays, in spite of himself, that ambition which incites him to keep up the rage of Eteocles against his brother, and to hasten the battle. Jocasta and Antigone give him plainly to understand that they perceive his motive for acting thus; but Creon dexterously attributes the terrors of Antigone to her passion for Hemon, who is his son and his rival. All these secret interests, which open successively, are here more extended than in Rotrou’s tragedy, where Creon suffers no other reproach for his eager desire of reigning than by a single word from Eteocles: but in Racine, it is Eteocles only who is the dupe of the ambitious Creon, whose interested projects are discovered by all the others: but why, when they are so solicitous to prevent the battle, do they not give Eteocles a hint of the treachery and baseness of Creon?

A C T II.

Hemon entertains Antigone with his passion, while Jocasta is gone to the temple to consult the oracle. This scene has more gallantry in it than that of the old poet, and therefore pleases less. Was it a time to think of love when the state was upon the point of suffering a revolution? Racine perceived this fault himself; and therefore, in his preface to this play, he acknowledges that love, when made the busines of a subordinate character, “ becomes a passion foreign to the subject, and likewise that the tenderness or jealousies of lovers cannot properly have a place amidst incests,

"paricides, and all those horrors which compose the history of "Oedipus and his unhappy family."

Olympia, Jocasta's confidant, brings an account that the oracle demands a sacrifice of the last of the royal race. Hemon and Antigone doubt whether one of them is not meant by this oracle; but what foundation have they for these doubts? are they ignorant that neither of them is the last branch of the royal stock? The oracle points out Menœceus, Creon's youngest son, plainly enough: this is an unpardonable fault.

Polynices, in his interview with Jocasta and Antigone, maintains the same haughty and inflexible character which Rotrou has given him; and Racine has here exactly copied the old poet; and it is really astonishing, that being so great an admirer of Euripides as he was, he should not have chosen to represent Polynices in his true colours: he would have pleased more than even by putting the following beautiful lines into his mouth.

"Est-ce au peuple, Madame, à se donner un Maître?
 "Si-tôt qu'il hait un Roi doit-on cesser de l'être?
 "Sa haine ou son amour sont-ce les premiers droits,
 "Qui font monter au Trône ou descendre les Rois?
 "Que le peuple à son gré nous craigne ou nous chérisse,
 "Le sang nous met au Trône, & non pas son caprice.
 "Ce que le sang lui donne il le doit accepter,
 "Et s'il n'aime son prince, il le doit respecter."

And these concerning Eteocles,

"C'est un Tyran qu'on aime,
 "Qui par cent lâchetés à se maintenir
 "Au rang où par la force il a su parvenir,
 "Et son orgueil le rend par un effet contraire
 "Esclave de son peuple & Tyran de son frere,
 "Pour commander tout seul il veut bien obéir,
 "Et se fait mépriser pour me faire haïr, &c."

Antigone says all that nature and Rotrou have dictated to the most pathetic poet that ever wrote; but Polynices is inexorable. In this perplexity a soldier comes hastily to inform him that the truce has just been broke: he departs instantly, and thus frees himself from the importunities of a mother and a sister. Racine has managed this incident with great art. It was Creon who had contrived to raise a tumult, being apprehensive that a reconciliation would be effected between the brothers.

A C T III.

Jocasta sends her confidant to observe what passes, and pronounces a fine soliloquy after having prepared the episode of Menecius, who is supposed to be gone to enquire how things went on between the two armies.

Eteocles, returning with Creon, clears himself from any suspicion of having broken the truce designedly: he tells the queen that it was a slight quarrel at first, which insensibly turned to a general engagement. Creon pretends to be desirous of peace; but the king, who is effectually imposed upon by him, urges him, on the contrary, to take vengeance on the enemy for the death of his son. Immediately a messenger brings notice that Polynices demands an interview with his brother. This incident is not well introduced. The king yields, although with great difficulty, to the intreaties of Jocasta, Antigone, and even Creon, who exhorts him to see his brother; but as soon as Creon is left alone with his confidant, he pulls off the mask, and unfolds the horrible mystery which had induced him to prefer an interview between the brothers before an open war. He would reign; but he is not willing to gratify his ambition at the expence of any more of his blood. The war might prove fatal to his son Hemon, whose brother he had so lately lost. He knows the deep-rooted hatred between Eteocles and Polynices; and his design is, that the brothers should stifle each other in their mutual embraces; that is, that this interview shall produce a single combat. This is an impious stroke; but is he not mistaken in his policy? May not one or other of the princes conquer? and in this case would not Creon be greatly disappointed? But he is represented as a tyrant, blinded by his extreme ambition, and makes it his glory to appear a villain in the eyes of his confidant, provided he can perceive the least probability of one day ascending the throne.

A C T IV.

In the conversation between Creon and Eteocles, the former, still disguising his sentiments, thus artfully speaks to the king concerning Polynices.

“ Mais s'il vous cede enfin la grandeur souveraine,
“ Vous devez ce me semble, appaiser votre haine.”

The

The king, who does not perceive the design of this insinuation, because no one has charity enough to unfold the mystery to him, swears an eternal hatred to Polynices, and strongly paints the antipathy that divides them. They hated each other before they were born, and their hatred will continue even after their death.

“ J'aurois même regret qu'il me quittât l'empire---

“ Je veux qu'il me déteste afin de le haïr, &c.”

This passage is worthy the author of *Phedra* and *Andromache*. Creon, perceiving that he had brought Eteocles to the point he wished, consents, since it must be so, to sacrifice his ardent desire for peace.

Notice is given that Polynices is arrived; and accordingly he enters immediately afterwards, accompanied by Jocasta, Antigone, and the whole court. This scene is taken wholly from Seneca, or Rotrou, but embellished. The queen weeps and solicits in vain.

“ Tous deux pour s'attendrir ils ont l'ame trop dure.

“ Ils ne connoissent plus la voix de la nature.”

Speaking to Polynices, she adds some reproaches.

“ Et vous que je croïois plus doux & plus soumis, &c.”

In this she is certainly in the wrong, for it is not in this light that Polynices is represented throughout the course of this poem: he always supports that haughty and inflexible character which the poet has thought fit to give him. It is he who proposes the single combat, Eteocles accepts it. The despair of Jocasta produces no change in their resolution. But after these tragick incidents, which ought to be reserved for the end of the scene, the poet makes Jocasta propose the conquests of other kingdoms to Polynices. She afterwards leaves them in the same manner as in Seneca and Rotrou.

“ Et moi je vais, cruels, vous apprendre à mourir:

“ ANTIG. Madame---O Ciel! que vois-je? hélas rien ne les touche!”

Antigone says no more; and her brothers breaking from her, fly to the combat. The poet has done well in making this princess keep silence all this time. Three speakers in a scene, where the situa-

situation was so violent, were quite sufficient. All that Antigone can now do is to send Hemon after her brothers, to separate them.

A C T V.

Antigone, by her tears and complaining stanzas, acquaints us that Jocasta has killed herself. She deliberates whether she shall not follow her mother; but tenderness for her lover prevails over the glory of imitating her example.

“ Dois-je vivre ? dois-je mourir ?
 “ Un amant me retient, une mère m’appelle.
 “ Dans la nuit du tombeau je la vois qui m’attend;
 “ Ce que veut la raison, l’amour me le défend,
 “ Et me n’ôte l’envie.
 “ Que je vois des sujets d’abandonner le jour !
 “ Mais, hélas, qu’on tient à la vie
 “ Quand on tient si fort à l’amour ?
 “ Hémon vois le pouvoir que l’amour a sur moi.
 “ Je ne vivrois pas pour moi-même,
 “ Et je veux bien vivre pour toi.”

Olympia, who from the beginning of this tragedy to the end, is continually employed in running between the camp and the palace, comes to tell Antigone, that Polynices has conquered; for she has seen only half the combat. This happy thought Racine has borrowed from Corneille’s * *Horace*, where Julia informs old Horace, that she had seen his son flying before the Alban champion.

Creon afterwards presents himself to Antigone, who gives him to understand that she thinks his cruel and ambitious policy well punished by the victory of Polynices; but Creon undeceives her, by acquainting her with the true event of the combat: Eteocles, he tells her, dying, killed his brother; and Hemon likewise endeavouring to separate them, became the victim of his obedience to the commands of Antigone, who had charged him not to quit her brothers. The death of Hemon inspires Creon with new hopes: he weeps for his son, but he loses a rival: he even ventures to offer his hand and throne to Antigone. She answers,

“ Je le refuserois de la main des Dieux même,
 “ Et vous osez, Crémon, m’offrir le Diadème !

* *Horace*, Act III. Scene 6.

" CREON Je fçai que ce haut rang n'a rien de glorieux,
 " Qui ne cede à l'honneur de l'offrir à vos yeux.
 " D'un si noble destin me croyez-vous indigne?"

Is it possible to make the least reflection upon this discourse of Creon's, without allowing that it is worthier of a Tartuffe than of a father who had just lost his two sons, and who had subverted the state, that he might possess the throne? Ambition ought to have been his only passion; love is abominable in his mouth. However he continues thus:

" Mais si l'on peut prétendre à cette illustre gloire,
 " Si par d'illustres faits on peut la mériter,
 " Que faut-il faire enfin, Madame?
 " ANTIG. M'imiter."

This thought is very beautiful; but Creon ought not to have been made ridiculous for the sake of introducing a fine thought. He is yet more so in the following scene, where he understands this expression as a certain sign that Antigone has relented with regard to him. The infamous contriver of so many crimes, of the murder of the two brothers, his sovereigns; and of the two princes, his sons, is not ashamed to boast of these actions, because by them he gains a throne and a mistress. We allow the force of ambition in a furious prince, who is solely employed in sacrificing every thing that obstructs his way to the throne; but is it natural to imagine that this very prince, who is a father also, should rejoice at having lost a rival in his own son; and above all, that he should deceive himself so greatly as to imagine he is beloved by a princess who had penetrated into the views of his barbarous policy; who had reproached him with them to his face; and who had shewn him contempt, sufficient to have discouraged any one but himself? Is it natural, I repeat, that notwithstanding all this, he should be mad enough to reckon upon the love of Antigone on no other foundation than one word; which was likewise so far from being obscure, that its beauty consists in its shewing plainly the resolution Antigone had taken to kill herself, that she might follow her mother and her lover.

Accordingly, this is what really happens; and that we may not doubt it, Olympa, the general messenger of the play, comes to acquaint Creon, that Antigone had stabbed herself with a poniard, pronouncing these words:

"Cher Hémon, c'est à toi que je me sacrifie."

Creon, at this news, seems to be upon the point of sacrificing himself to Antigone, so full is he of his extravagant passion, which had been so little marked till the fifth act. The throne is now despised, Antigone was all he valued; he addresses these words to the Gods:

"Vous m'ôtez Antigone, ôtez moi tout le reste."

He beseeches them to strike him with thunder. Certainly he has no sword; for the Greeks never wore one but when they were travelling, or in war. At length, overcome with rage and despair, he falls into the arms of his guards.

I have dwelt the longer upon these last passages, in order to shew that it is not enough to contrive a great number of beautiful springs to the theatrical machine, if they are not all played off together, and with propriety: therefore the Greeks, and Racine in imitation of them in some of his other pieces, have given more simplicity to their works. A single voice is more moving and produces a greater effect than twenty; especially if one be out of tune. In like manner, one passion well supported, is more likely to reach the heart than several, although they should mutually aid each other: how much more then when one destroys the other, as love and ambition in this tragedy?

After this analysis of Racine's tragedy, it will not be difficult to discover how much of it belongs to Seneca, and how much to Rotrou; and we cannot help being surprised that Racine should be so far blinded by his fondness for his first tragedy as to endeavour to persuade us in his preface, that when he composed it, "He formed his plan upon the Phenicians of Euripides; and with regard to the Thebaid, which is given to Seneca, he was of the same opinion as Heinlius, that not only it was not written by Seneca, but also that it appeared to be the composition of some claimer, who knew not the nature of tragedy."

Affuredly Racine did not adopt these sentiments, till the time that he printed this preface; that is, till long after he had found out that the method pursued by the Greek poets was far better than that of the Latin.

T H E
J O C A S T A
O F
L O D O V I C O D O L C E.

THE Italian Poet has, like all the others who have written upon this story, given his play a different title from that of the Greek one; for the Thebaid, Antigone, and Jocasta, are all founded on the Phenicians of Euripides. Dolce, as usual, has translated him; but he cannot be excused for having altered the second scene, which is extremely fine. He durst not venture to shew Antigone upon a tower, as the Greek poet has done; and this scruple has made him lose all the beauty of that scene, in which Euripides had so happily imitated Homer. Certainly these two ancient poets were guides good enough to justify Dolce for not going aside from their paths on this occasion, since he has scarcely done any thing more than translate them throughout the rest of his plays.

F f f 2

M E D E A.

M E D E A.

A

T R A G E D Y B Y E U R I P I D E S.

JASON, no longer mindful of his great obligations to Medea, who in his attempt to gain the golden fleece, had delivered him from certain death, and had sacrificed every thing that ought to have been dear to her, to follow him through innumerable dangers, resolves to banish her and the children he had by her; having first married Glauca, the daughter of the king of Corinth, before her face. Medea's revenge for these injuries makes the subject of the tragedy. The action is so striking, that it has afforded matter for several tragedies, all of them imitations of that of Euripides. Ovid composed one which has not come down to us, and of which Quintilian has preserved this celebrated line :

Servare potui, perdere an possum rogas?

“ Si jai pu le sauver ne puis-je le détruire ?”

Ennius translated the Medea of Euripides into Latin verse, some fragments of which are to be found in the works of Cicero. It is said that Mecenas himself had treated this subject; but the best of these compositions which we have now remaining, are the Medea of Seneca, that of Lodovico Dolce, a translation of it by Buchanan, a tragedy by Peter Corneille, under the title of Medea, without reckoning * that called the Golden Fleece, and the Opera of Theseus. We are now to examine that tragedy of Euripides which has given rise to all the others.

His actors are nine in number; namely Medea, Jason, Creon, king of Corinth; Egeus king of Athens; the two sons of Medea, still children; their Governor, Medea's confidant; and an officer,

* This play has no relation to the present subject, although Medea is the principal character in it.

besides

besides the Chorus, composed of Corinthian women, faithful to the interests of Medea. The scene is in the vestibule of Creon's palace. Corneille* calls it a public square, and thinks there is a great impropriety in introducing kings and princes conversing in such a place. In this last article he is certainly right; but there is no reason to believe, that these vestibules where Euripides so frequently lays the scenes were always public places. Sometimes these porticoes were within view of the squares and streets, as is supposed in the tragedy of Orestes; but there is no proof that this was always the case.

It will be proper to relate here in few words the history of Medea, so elegantly written in the seventh book of Ovid's Metamorphoses: she was daughter to Æta, king of Colchos, † and very skilful in the magic art; which means no more than that she possessed a great share of wit; but she made an ill use of her knowledge, for she became famous for her crimes. Her passion for Jason was the source of them all. Jason was the son of Æson, king of Iolcos; Pelias, his uncle, had usurped the dominions of Æson. The young prince, who had been conveyed out of the tyrant's reach, returned when he was grown a man, and claimed his right; but Pelias, like an able politician, to get rid of him, plausibly prevailed upon him to engage in the enterprize of the golden fleece, at the head of the Argonauts. The design of this expedition was to carry away this rich fleece, which was guarded by a horrible dragon, and several bulls, who breathed fire and flames. On his arrival at Colchos, Medea fell in love with him, and made him master of the treasures without danger, but at the expence of her country and of her father Æta, whose destiny depended upon the fleece. The lovers fled, Æta pursued them, but in vain. Jason returned to Iolcos with his wife, who contrived to free him from the usurper Pelias, by pretending that she was possessed of a secret which would restore his youth; and upon this ridiculous pretence prevailed upon his own daughters to kill him. After this action, Jason and Medea were obliged to take refuge in Corinth, where Jason, to gratify a new passion, abandoned Medea. On this last circumstance Euripides has founded his tragedy. We are not now to separate the historical from the fabulous part of Medea's story, since it is the latter which furnishes most of the incidents in

* P. Corneille in his critique on the Medea. † Colchos, the capital of Colchide, at the mouth of the Phafe.

this piece ; we shall only observe, that although Medea is guilty of having betrayed her father, and of killing her brother Absyrtus, whose limbs, it is said, she scattered along the road to stop her father in his pursuit of her, is yet cleared of the murder of her children, by some writers, who would at least render this matter doubtful. Aelian, for example says, that by another tradition, it was not Medea who killed her sons, but the Corinthians ; and he adds, that it was at the intreaty of the Corinthians, that Euripides altered his subject, and cast the odium of this horrible crime upon Medea. There are even some critics who will have it, but upon what authority is uncertain, that Euripides received five talents from the Corinthians, for laying his plan in this manner ; but whether this be true or not, Euripides might in this subject, as in others, have different traditions ; and that he has followed was much better calculated for the stage than any other.

A C T I.

Medea's confidant opens the scene. “ *Would to the Gods, says she, that the Argonauts vessel had never reached the shore of Colchos ! Oh that the pines of Mount Pelion had never been felled to build that fatal vessel ! and that the fleece had still remained in the possession of Æta ! ” She has reason for these wishes : Medea would not then have been criminal, and unhappy ; criminal in having caused Pelias to be murdered at Iolcos by his daughters, deceived by her promise, that they should restore his youth ; unhappy, by the perfidy of her husband, who had ta-

* Phedrus, in one of his fables, informs us of two things worthy observation. The first is, that this manner of opening the scene was greatly admired in his time, since in deriding the censures passed upon his fables, he quotes this passage as being singularly beautiful. The second, that this very passage was condemned by superficial critics, because Minos had sailed upon the Egean sea before Argus built the ship which was called by his name ; therefore it could not be the first vessel that ever was built ; and Euripides was to blame in representing it as the first. Phedrus answers this criticism as follows : “ How shall we

“ please then, oh reader ! whose censures are more rigid than Cato's, since thou findest fault with fables of every kind ? Take my counsel, do not cavil at letters, left thou shouldst suffer in thy turn. This fable is expressly written against such as profess to despise every work of wit ; and who aspire to the reputation of superiority of taste and judgment, by condemning those excellencies which they are not able to comprehend.”

La Fontaine has imitated this fable in that, in which he ridicules persons of a nice and difficult taste. It is the 23 fable, and begins with this line :

“ Quand j'aurois en naissant recu de Calliope, &c.”

kén

ken her with him to Corinth to sacrifice her there to a new passion. "Medea, continues she, abandoned to her despair, attests "his violated faith, and all the Gods which he invoked at his "marriage with her: she consumes away with grief; irrecoverable "she sits, like a marble statue, and shews no sign of life but when "she laments her father, her country, and her family, which she "betrayed to follow a stranger, who in his turn betrays and de- "spises her. Too late, and to her cost, she learns how desirable a "thing it is to dwell in one's native land. She hates even her chil- "dren, and can no longer endure them in her sight." In a word, the confidant is apprehensive that a grief so excessive will have fatal consequences. "I know her well, says she, a heart haughty "and fierce like hers, will not bear injuries unrevenged."

Perceiving the children of Medea, who enter with their governor *, "Alas, says she, these little ones know not that their mother is wretched! happy age, which is exempted from anxiety "and sorrow." The Governor asks her why she has left Medea alone; she answers, that being full of grief herself, she was obliged to come out of the palace to make her complaints to heaven and to the earth. A Grecian custom, which shews that these detached prologues were still founded on the ancient manner; and therefore did not disgust the Greeks as they do us. They complained to the sun, or to the echoes, which signifies nothing more than that they gave free vent to their griefs. And it is on this custom probably that the soliloquies of the Greek poets and those of Euripides in particular were founded.

The Governor tells her, that Medea was still ignorant of the new insults which she was reserved to suffer; and that it was determined she should be banished from Corinth with her children. The confidant observes to the young princes that their father was going to abandon them: she afterwards desires the Governor to lead them in, but not to suffer them to approach their mother, whose rage seems to foretel some fatal attempt. This scene between two persons faithful to the interests of Medea has in it all the beautiful simplicity of those of Terence.

Just as the two princes are going to enter the palace, Medea is heard lamenting aloud: she calls herself the most wretched of women: she utters imprecations against her husband, her children, and her whole family. These and other complaints of the like

* In the Greek Nurse, as in the Electra of Sophocles, and the Phoenicians of Euripides.

nature are frequently intermingled with the reflexions of the confidant, who causes the children to retire precipitately, and pronounces a fine moral speech upon the devouring cares which princes are exposed to.

Some Corinthian ladies, who are to compose the Chorus, hearing the cries of Medea, hasten to comfort her: she renews her complaints, but does not appear, which affords another subject of reflection and tender pity to her friends; such as the ladies which compose the Chorus are supposed to be. They prevail upon the confidant to intreat Medea to shew herself, that they may endeavour to console her. "I will do what you desire, replies she, but "I am not sure that she will yield to my intreaties. I will con- "jure her to come to you, although, like an enraged lioness; her "looks will make us tremble if we attempt to speak to her. Ah "foolish mortals! why have you invented songs to enliven hearts, "yet neglect to study the more useful art of soothing grief, and "calming those horrid transports of despair and rage, by which "whole families are often ruined. The powers of harmony "ought to be applied to ease affliction. Why should we seek by "songs to heighten the festivity of feasts, which in themselves are "sufficient to inspire mirth and joy?"

To Euripides, this thought appeared beautiful; however Aristotle was of a different opinion. Hugo * Grotius has been at the pains to translate it into very fine Latin verse; and so also has Buchanan, in his *Medea*; but these strokes of Anacreontic wit, which in tragedy seem out of their place, shew us how difficult it is to represent our Greek poets such as they really are. Many of these fine passages are lost to those who will not in imagination transport themselves into the age in which they were produced.

A C T II.

Medea being informed by her confidant that the Corinthian ladies are waiting in expectation of seeing her, consents to shew her-

" Nil me peccet, Judice, si quis
" Proavos multum sapuisse neget.
" Placuit thalamos quibus & festas
" Ornare dapes carmine, latae
" Quod mulceret moliter aures:
" At multifides nemo Camænis
" Docuit stygios siskere luctus,

" Unde & mortes, & funesti
" Casus totas vertere domos.
" Atqui potius debuit istis
" Musa mederi; namquid cœnâ
" Ridente juvat tendere vocem
" Cum res per se sit grata satis
" Dulcis moribus esca?"

self: here, if we may be allowed the phrase, she keeps her court, and begins by artfully conciliating the affections of the ladies, to induce them to engage in her interests. She tells them, that she would not give them any cause to complain of her, by not consenting to see them. Princes, she says, oftentimes offend either by shewing themselves too much, or too little; yet her grief requires solitude, for abandoned by her husband, the sport of a foreign court, she has now no resource but the grave. She shews the unhappiness of those women whose rank obliges them to marry, in terms nearly the same as Hippolitus paints that of a man who is determined to take a wife.

"A woman, says Medea, must purchase a husband; that is a "master, and perhaps a harsh one: destined to be a slave, she "knows not to whom her liberty will be sold; and one may say, "she enters into a new region." She goes on in this manner, but always excepts the ladies to whom she speaks; for they may at least console themselves for making a bad choice, by reflecting that they are in the bosom of their natural country, and under the protection of their friends; but she is a helpless stranger, without relations, without friends, to whom can she confide her sorrows? All this is applied with great artifice to move the compassion of the Chorus; and indeed she gains them over to her interest so absolutely, that Corneille * it seems, was not surprised to find this princess intrust the Chorus afterwards with the secret of her designed vengeance against a perfidious husband, and an odious tyrant; for Medea, although criminal, is reduced to such extreme distress, and so inhumanly treated by her husband, and the king of Corinth, that she has every voice in her favour.

For this reason therefore it may be said, that this tragedy seems to authorise, or rather to justify crimes, and those most execrable; but besides that Medea is punished by her own wickedness, it must be allowed the behaviour of Jason in some measure forces her to commit these horrid deeds, and renders her less hateful to the audience. This character which Euripides has produced upon the stage is a very uncommon one, and is finely expressed after him by Quinaut, in the opera of Theseus.

"Le destin de Medée est d'être criminelle,

"Mais son cœur étoit fait pour être vertueux." Act II. Sc. I.

* Corneille's critique upon Medea.

And in the ninth scene of the second act,

“ Dépit mortel, transports jaloux
 “ Je m'abandonne à vous.
 “ Et toi, meurs pour toujours tendresse trop fatale.
 “ Que le barbare amour que j'avois crû si doux
 “ Se change dans mon cœur en Furie infernale!
 “ Dépit mortel, transports jaloux
 “ Je m'abandonne à vous.
 “ Inventons quelque pein affreuse & sans égale,
 “ Préparons avec soin nos plus funestes coups :
 “ Ah! si l'ingrat que j'aime échape à mon courroux,
 “ Au moins n'épargnons pas mon heureuse rivale.
 “ Dépit mortel, transports jaloux.
 “ Je m'abandonne à vous.”

The Chorus therefore engage heartily in the interest of Medea. Hereupon Creon king of Corinth appears with the air of a tyrant, and comes himself to declare to Medea that he dooms her and her children to banishment. This is a little brutal it must be confessed: he does not even scruple to tell her his reasons for this resolution: he dreads the effects of her jealousy, and her dangerous art; for he is not ignorant that she is well skilled in magic, a science esteemed among the Greeks, but its professors were always held in suspicion, and therefore Medea exclaims against her fatal knowledge. “ The merit, says she, is disgraceful; and the science, by “ creating envy, raises persecutors who endeavour to render it odious.” Then, after a fine moral on this head, she adds, that the abject state of her fortune ought not to render her formidable to a king; that it is her husband and not the king whom she accuses of breach of faith; and lastly, all she begs is a retreat in some part of his dominions, where she may live unknown. But Creon denies her request: he dreads her calmness more than her fury: he expected from a princess thus outraged, the most violent transports of indignation; and he only sees an unhappy woman bathed in tears, who falls at his feet, and makes use of all the moving rhetorick of grief to excite his pity; but this itself produces a quite contrary effect, and seems to him to be a juster cause for his apprehensions: some fatal design he thinks must be concealed under a moderation so unexpected. Therefore all that Medea can obtain, after having descended to supplications and tears, is only one day to prepare herself for her exile; and even this short interval he grants

grants reluctantly. We think we see Dido imploring of her faithless Eneas a short delay.

“Tempus inane peto, requiem spatiumque furori, &c.”

This scene of Euripides is at least touched with as much delicacy as that of Virgil. The same genius appears in both, but with this difference however, that to us the behaviour of Creon would appear brutal; but this, after all, is a true picture of the Greeks. Medea therefore says to him, “ Deign at least to grant me one day “ to prepare myself for this hasty banishment: suffer me to provide “ for the security of my unhappy children, since their father now dis- “ dains to trouble himself with these tender cares. Oh, let compas- “ sion touch thy heart! Alas, thou art thyself a father, and mayst “ thou not feel the pangs of a parent reduced to the extremest “ wretchedness? It is not my own misfortunes which I deplore; “ it is not my own banishment which affects me, it is their misery “ which throws me into despair.” Moved with these affecting intreaties, Creon tells her, that he has not the heart of a tyrant. He grants her a day's delay, as we have already observed; but it is upon condition that she shall be punished with death if after that space she is found in Corinth. This cruelty towards her increases the compassion of the Chorus.

Creon retires, and then Medea gives a loose to rage. “ Could “ you suppose, says she, that Medea would have stooped to flatter “ a tyrant, but for the hope of vengeance; at least I have pur- “ chased the advantage of a day's delay from the unthinking trai- “ tor; precious day! in which the father, the daughter, and the “ husband shall fall a sacrifice to my wrongs.” She then considers in what manner she shall destroy them; she fears not death, but of failing in her revenge, and of becoming the scorn of her enemies. At length she resolves to make use of magic philtres, or, in plain terms, of poison. “ But, resumes she, when I have sacrificed them, “ where shall I find an asylum, what friendly hand will lead me “ from the danger? I see no succour, no resource for me. Well “ then, I will stay; and relying upon the hope of some secure retreat, “ with secrecy and silence I will compleat my vengeance: but “ what if I should be discovered, and be obliged instantly to depart? “ yet still I will be revenged; with my poniard will I pierce their “ hearts, and perish myself, rather than not see them perish. “ My rage no longer can be restrained; it knows no bounds. No,

" venerable Hecate*, thou whom I have chosen for my tutelary divinity, it shall never be said that my foes have with impunity enjoyed the cruel pleasure of sporting with my miseries; I will change their hymenial joys into death and desolation. Go then, Medea, employ all thy enchantments, carry thy revenge to cruelty: revenge thy monstrous wrongs, thou who art descended from the sun, all-powerful in charms and spells; and what is more, a woman, an injured woman; and therefore capable of the most daring schemes to satisfy thy vengeance. Shalt thou, Medea, become the jest of the perfidious Jason, and the infamous descendants of † Sisyphus?"

She retires; and the Chorus, who are now wholly devoted to her, enjoy, by anticipation, the designed vengeance of Medea, and the glory she is preparing for the sex, by punishing the perfidy of a husband. This very Chorus, although they are struck with horror at Jason's crime, yet pretend to justify the most barbarous revenge a wife thus injured can take: a pernicious moral, and wholly inexcusable here, but in consideration of the rage with which Medea had inflamed the hearts of these women, and the notion they had of the punishment due to those husbands who violate their conjugal faith.

A C T III.

We have here, as in Virgil, an interview between a husband and a wife despised and abandoned: a scene which requires great delicacy to manage happily; and which, even in this judicious poet, seems not faultless; for Eneas acts but a very indifferent part, as well as Pyrthus, in Racine's Andromache; but in my opinion Euripides has succeeded best. However, a situation of this kind being a source of great beauties, a poet who was fond of the pathetic could not well omit it.

Jason speaks first, but his whole discourse is rather artful than solid. According to him, Medea has none but herself to blame for her banishment from Corinth: she might have lived happily there if she could have subdued her rage: her furious transports against a great king reduced Jason to the necessity of concealing even his compassion for her, and of thinking her happy in escaping with a punishment so gentle as exile. He protests that he has used his utmost endeavours to soften Creon, but all were ineffectual, because Medea had enraged the king by the wild fallies of her fury. Jason

* The Moon, who is the Goddess of Magicians. † An ancient king of Corinth.
how-

however would at least alleviate the misfortunes of his wife by affording her some relief in her banishment. Medea, enraged at such a speech, and at the insulting offer he makes her, interrupts Jason, and loads him with the harshest epithets. She sacrificed every thing for him; she even became criminal to serve him; she had caused the old king Pelias to be murdered by his own daughters; she preserved Jason from a thousand dangers; by her aid it was that he overcame the bulls who breathed out horrid flames; by her he deceived the vigilance of the dragon who guarded the golden fleece; and how has he rewarded her for so many benefits? He repudiates her, and marries her rival before her face: she reproaches him with his violated faith, and all those deceitful vows of love which he had made her. "Say, pursues she, thus loaded "with contempt and misery, whither shall I direct my steps? to "my country, and to the palace of my father? Alas! I have be- "trayed my country and my father for thee. Shall I seek an "asylum with the unfortunate daughters of Pelias? how will they "receive her who murdered their father? Alas! I have no longer "relations and friends; inhuman as thou art, I have sacrificed "them all for thee, &c." These sentiments are much the same with those expressed by Hermione, when abandoned by Pyrrhus.

" Je ne t'ai pas aimé, cruel: qu'ai-je donc fait?
 " J'ai dédaigné pour toi les vœux de tous nos Princes:
 " Je t'ai cherché moi-même au fonds de tes Provinces;
 " J'y suis encor malgré tes infidélités, &c."

Medea's transports are still greater; for she was more injuriously treated than Hermione, who in Racine's tragedy is not the wife of Pyrrhus. Her children, reduced to a miserable state of poverty by a father who consents to this banishment, give new force also to her complaints and reproaches, which are but too well grounded.

Jason answers like a perplexed orator, who seeks by artful evasions to elude the force of strong arguments. To Venus, and not to Medea, he attributes his success in his attempt to gain the golden fleece. Medea's passion, he says, forced her in spite of herself to assist him: a bad excuse this; and therefore he slightly passes it over, and thinks himself sufficiently cleared of the charge of ingratitude, since he had requited her favours by bringing her from a barbarous region into Greece, a polished country, which revered merit, and knew how to value the wit and knowledge that Medea possessed. This is a compliment to Greece; but so misplaced and so little suited with a scene of this kind, that one

hardly knows how to mention it. With regard to his new marriage, Jason excuses it in a manner, which to the ancients alone could appear supportable. He tells Medea, that in this marriage he sought only a royal alliance, and a necessary support for her and her children. He was an exile like her, without friends or support; a sad inheritance for an illustrious posterity! This new marriage gives him dignity and wealth, and procures his children powerful friends. Jason seems to expect that Medea should think herself obliged to him for a breach of faith which he proves to be so highly advantageous for her.

Custom set aside, as a thing very different in different ages, we cannot but acknowledge that Pyrrhus in the Andromache of Racine alledges still worse reasons to Hermione for his treatment of her, when he tells her plainly,

“ Je voulus m’obstiner à vous être fidèle :
 “ Je vous reçus en Reine, & jusques à ce jour
 “ J’ai crû que mes sermens me tiendroient lieu d’amour.
 “ Mais cet Amour l’emporte, & par un coup funeste
 “ Andromaque m’arrache un cœur qu’elle deteste.
 “ L’un par l’autre entraînés nous courons à l’autel
 “ Nous jurer malgré nous un amour éternel.”

Jason denies that it was love which made him break through his engagements with Medea: he insists that it was the interest of his wife and his children which he consulted in his marriage with the Corinthian princess. The Chorus tell him plainly that his arguments are indeed specious, but that his conduct is wholly inexcusable; and indeed the reasons urged by this prince for his infidelity must certainly have appeared specious to those who were present, since Medea herself thinks them worthy of an answer.

“ I will confound thee, says she, by a single word: why, if thou
 “ thoughtest this marriage innocent, wouldst thou have concealed it
 “ from me? No, no, adds she, my interest was not thy motive;
 “ thou despisest a foreign wife, and one who is in the decline of
 “ age.”

Jason persists in his defence; and, as a last farewell, offers Medea money and pledges of hospitality,* to be used in whatever foreign

“ * In the original Greek, εἰράς τι πέμπων
 “ σύμβολα, οἱ δημοκρίτες οὐ λύ, to send pledges to
 “ strangers or hosts, that they might use
 “ her well. It was a custom among the
 “ ancients, and indeed still prevails among

“ some people, to give to a friend, wife, or
 “ relation, the *teffera hospitalis*; which was
 “ no other than a token to be shewn occa-
 “ sionally, when the giver was absent, as an
 “ evidence of his friendship and esteem.”

country she should fix her residence. This will afford a fine subject for criticism to the outrageous enemies of theatrical antiquity; but as it regards an ancient custom, it must be ascribed to the age in which Euripides wrote. I take notice of it here only to warn the reader, that it is not my design either to disguise or embellish this poet, although, in a regular translation, it would be but bare justice to substitute something in its place more agreeable to our manners.

Medea, always haughty and noble in her anger, refuses to accept of any assistance from a perjured wretch. Jason takes the Gods to witness that he has used his utmost endeavours in favour of Medea and her children: she bids him go to his new bride, almost in the same terms as Hermione sends Pyrrhus to Andromache.

“ Perfide, je le voi,
 “ Tu comptes les momens que tu perds avec moi ;
 “ Ton cœur impatient de revoir ta Troyenne
 “ Ne souffre qu'à regret qu'une autre t'entretienne.
 “ Tu lui parles du cœur, tu lui parles des yeux.
 “ Je ne te retiens plus; sauve toi de ces lieux :
 “ Va lui jurer la foi que tu m'avois jurée;
 “ Va profaner des Dieux la majesté sacrée.
 “ Ces Dieux, ces justes Dieux, n'auront pas oublié
 “ Que les mêmes fermens avec moi t'ont lié.
 “ Porte au pied des autels ce cœur qui m'abandonne,
 “ Va, cours, mais crains encor d'y trouver Hermione.”

Medea's farewell however is shorter, and breathes more rage than Hermione's, and so it should be. “ Go to thy new bride; ah “ I perceive it! thou art miserable when absent from her, and I “ detain thee too long. Go, haste to the altar, conclude thy mar- “ riage, which thanks to the Gods, thou shalt long repent.”

The Corinthian ladies trace the misfortunes of Medea to their source, which is love. They supplicate Venus, (who with the Grecian Chorusses is a very virtuous Goddess) not to mingle the cares, the jealousies, and the transports of an extravagant passion in their marriages. Afterwards reflecting upon the banishment of Medea, they rejoice in their own good fortune, which affords them the blessing of dwelling in their native country; a blessing enhanced by their compassion for the dreadful consequences of exile. Medea, mean time, absorbed in her own reflections, continues upon the stage.

Egeus,

Egeus, king of Athens, arrives all on a sudden, and as if he had fallen from the clouds. This is a personage introduced on purpose to extricate Medea from her perplexity. The king and Medea relate their adventures to each other: it is easy to perceive the design of this scene. Egeus is just come from Delphos, whither he had been to implore an heir of Apollo, and had received a very obscure oracle, for the interpretation of which he depended upon the wisdom of Pitheus, king of Trezene. Medea takes advantage of this opportunity to declare her wrongs to Egeus: she implores his assistance, and an asylum in his dominions, in the most pathetic manner imaginable; promises that in return she will furnish him by her art with an infallible secret for the attainment of his desires. Egeus engages in her interests, but upon condition that she will go to Athens without suffering it to appear that this design had been concerted between them; otherwise Creon and Jason would have a right to claim her, and bring her back by force. Medea promises to be wholly directed by him; but that she may be assured of his protection, she requires an oath of him that he will not abandon her; and this under pretence that if the new-made allies should demand an explanation of this conduct, his oath would shield him from any reproach. The oath is sworn after the manner of the Greeks, as we have already seen in the Iphigenia in Tauris; and the Chorus, affected with the generosity of Egeus, wish him a happy return into his own dominions, and all the good fortune which he so justly merits.

By this unexpected succour Medea sees one obstacle less to her designed vengeance; she is now provided with a secure retreat. "Now, oh Goddesses of vengeance, cries she, now I am secure of triumphing over my enemies! The way to victory is open to me, and hope begins to revive in my heart." Elated with this hope, she acquaints the Chorus with the plan she had laid to compass her revenge, which is to send for Jason, to regain his confidence and procure leave for her children to present a fatal gift to her rival. This is one part of her designed vengeance only; at the bare idea of the rest which she does not declare, she is struck with horror. "I tremble, says she, when I think of the horrid deed which must follow: for oh my resolution is fixed! these hands shall destroy my children!" Medea sighs and weeps while she pronounces these words. These returns of tenderness are well expressed in the French manner, in the opera of Theseus.

"Ah

" Ah faut-il me venger*
 " En perdant ce que j'aime !
 " Que fais-tu ma fureur ? Où vas-tu m'engager ?
 " Punir ce cœur ingrat, c'est me punir moi-même :
 " J'en mourrai de douleur : je tremble d'y songer.
 " Ah faut-il me venger
 " En perdant ce que j'aime !
 " Ma rivale triomphe & me voit outrager.
 " Quoi, laisser son amour sans peine, & sans danger !
 " Voir le spectacle affreux de son bonheur extrême !
 " Non, il faut me venger
 " En perdant ce que j'aime.

The Chorus, terrified and amazed, in vain endeavour to change the design of this furious mother. They represent to her the horrid cruelty of arming her hands against her own children. Medea answers, that their remonstrances come too late; that she is determined; and that, provided Jason be punished, she cares not at what price.

CHORUS. What ! art thou a mother, and wilt thou kill thy children?

MEDEA. Yes, that I may wound Jason in his most sensible part.

CHORUS. And will not this stroke recoil upon thyself?

MEDEA. It matters not. The die is cast : urge me no more.

Medea, perceiving how much the Corinthian ladies were affected with her dreadful resolution against her children, requires a promise of secrecy from them once more. Immediately she sends one of her women to seek Jason. " Go, says she, I know thy fidelity ; go, bring hither my victim ; thou, as my servant, and my confidant, ought doubly to assist my rage."

The Chorus persist in their endeavours to dissuade Medea from her execrable purpose. This part seems to have been sung. There are two stanzas employed in celebrating Athens, of which the sense is as follows : " Oh Athens ! Oh land beloved by the Gods ! " thou seat of wisdom, where the Muses pour forth all their harmony ; where Venus, upon the banks of the Cephisus, sheds an air as soft and sweet as the breath of Zephyrus, where Cypris, crowning her lovely hair with flowers, leaves behind her the tender loves and the genies which preside over arts and sciences."

* Thésée Opéra, Act. V. Sc. 1.

The Chorus, suddenly interrupting themselves, turn to Medea, and ask her "What reception she expects that Athens, a city so polished, " will afford a mother stained with the blood of her own children?" Here they renew their supplications to her to spare them, but in vain.

A C T IV.

Jason, in compliance with the message sent him by Medea, comes to hear what she has to say to him. Medea prosecutes the design she had laid in the foregoing scene, which anticipates this rather too much. She apologizes for the indecent transports of her rage: she acknowledges that she had been to blame in opposing a political marriage so advantageous for her children, and even for herself. She goes so far as to declare, that she is willing to assist at the marriage, and to crown the bride with her own hands. She calls her children. "Appear, says she, you dear pledges of our union, be not afraid to shew yourselves; come and embrace your father; stifle our former hatred; my resentment ceases, and I am reconciled to him. Come, kiss your father's hand. Alas! unhappy infants, will he long be yours? Oh heavens! what horrid ideas have I recalled to my remembrance! Terror seizes me, my heart melts with tenderness, I cannot restrain my tears." Her words here are ambiguous; but Jason attributes this tenderness to a sincere repentance for what was past. So capable is Medea of making even the emotions of nature subservient to her artifice and revenge. Jason commends her for having at last opened her eyes to her true interest: he assures his children that he will always love them with a father's affection: he flatters them with the hope of being one day kings of Corinth; and lastly, he wishes, that when he may see them again in a manutorage, he may find them worthy of him. "But why, says he to Medea, dost thou cast down thy eyes? why art thou bathed in tears? Ah, replies she, my children force these tears from me! I am a mother; this wish, so tender for them, which has escaped thee, awakes a secret apprehension in my mind that it will never be accomplished."

'Tis thus that Medea disguises the true cause of her grief, and leads Jason by degrees to the point she wished; which is, to procure a repeal of her children's banishment, through the interposition of the king's daughter. Jason promises to make the attempt, and flattens

ters himself with being able to succeed by the method Medea had pointed out to him. Medea at length proposes, in order to gain over the princess entirely, to send her by her children a present worthy of her acceptance; a magnificent robe, and a golden crown.
 " Make haste, says she to her woman, and bring hither the presents I have destined for the princess. Happy, happy, is she, in being united to such a husband as Jason! she is worthy to possess the precious pledge which the sun my ancestor gave to his posterity. Come, my dear children, take this robe, and this crown, bear this inestimable treasure to the royal bride."

Jason endeavours to hinder Medea from stripping herself thus, for a queen who had no occasion for her gifts. " Intoxicated, says he, with her foolish passion, she will think the heart of Jason more valuable than all the treasures of the world." " Ah, resumes Medea, the Gods themselves are moved by gifts. Gold acts more powerfully upon the heart than the most moving eloquence: she is a queen, she is happy, and I am a poor wandering fugitive. I would buy off my children's banishment not only with all my treasure, but with my life. Go then, my sons, present yourselves before my sovereign, and your father's wife; in treat, supplicate her, obtain your pardon, and prevail upon her to receive the presents you bring her. This is absolutely necessary. Go, accomplish my design, and bring me the happy news of your success."

I have been very full upon this interesting scene, to shew that Jason, after all, is rather too credulous. One would imagine that he ought to have known Medea too well to have been free from suspicion upon this occasion; but it must be acknowledged likewise, that men are blinded by their passions; and it is upon this principle, that the little distrust shewn by Pyrrhus, in Racine's Andromache, is excusable.

After the departure of Jason, the Chorus finish the scene: they foresee what is to happen; namely, that the princess will be murdered by the fatal gifts of Medea, who has, they say, adorned her for Pluto.

The governor of Medea's sons enters, leading them to her. " Thy children, says he, are no longer banished; the princess received thy present favourably." To this news Medea answers no otherwise than by sighs and tears, of which the governor, who is ignorant of her designs, is astonished so much the more, as he had expected to have seen her transported with joy. She orders him to

leave her; and addressing herself to her two sons, she says, " You
" have then, my dear children, a secure retreat in this palace. Here
" you will live in peace, but deprived of your mother; for I, alas!
" must wander throughout the world. I shall not enjoy that hap-
" piness which I expected from your maturer age. I shall not
" chuse you brides, nor kindle the nuptial torch for you. Fatal
" consequence of my rage against Creon! Have I brought you into
" the world then in vain? have all the cares your helpless infancy
" cost me been fruitless? I hoped that you would one day have been
" my support; and that the last duties would have been paid me by
" these dear hands: but, oh! what interest have you in me now?
" Separated from my children I am constrained to drag a miserable
" life, while you also must be transplanted into a stranger's family,
" and no longer be cherished with a mother's tender love. Ah!
" why do you look upon me thus, my sons? why these fond, these
" last caresses, why these tender smiles which wring my heart?
" Alas! my dear companions, what shall I do? this sight melts my
" resolves, and quite disarms me; but can I then subscribe to my
" own barbarous decree! No, my children shall go with me. What,
" shall I, to punish an ungrateful man, make myself wretched for
" ever? Oh, no! it must not be. And shall it then be said that
" the perfidious wretches enjoyed their guilt, and, safe from venge-
" ance, laughed at the miserable Medea? Ah, all my rage returns!
" now every deed of horror shall be acted; hence with this base soft-
" ness that could betray my resolutions. Go in, my children, I
" will follow you. Let the Gods and my enemies be witnesses of
" this sacrifice, it matters not, I shall not think my hands polluted
" by it----Ah! what am I going to do? Oh my heart, yield not
" to this horrid act! I will spare my own blood; they shall live,
" and be my comforts in my banishment. Oh no, by all the Gods
" I will not suffer my cruel enemies to hurt their helpless age!
" After what I have done, my sons cannot escape death. Well
" then, since such is their fate, they shall receive death from her
" who gave them life. 'Tis done, their sentence is pronounced.
" The fatal robe and crown have taken effect, the princess expires.
" Fly then, Medea, hasten thy vengeance, and call thy children for
" the last time: come, my sons, come and embrace your mother."
These last endearments and these mutual embraces must certainly
have been extremely affecting in the representation. Medea still
hears the voice of nature; she stifles it at length, and dismisses her
children as before. "Retire, my children, leave me. I can no lon-
ger

" ger support the sight of them ; I sink under the burthen of my woes. Alas ! I am sensible of all the horror of the deed I am going to perpetrate ; but rage has banished reason. What will not despair produce in the minds of wretched mortals."

There is nothing here from which we can collect, with any certainty, whether Medea continues upon the stage : It is very probable that she does ; and that, wholly absorbed in her own gloomy thoughts, she waits for the event of her presents. This appears by the beginning of the fifth act, and by the tranquillity of the Chorus, who in concluding the fourth act, indulge their reflections upon the cares and anxieties which a mother's fondness for her children necessarily create to her. They draw a comparison between the married and the single state, and prefer the undisturbed calm of the latter to all the painful advantages of the former. This moral is very beautiful, but certainly it is not spirited enough, after a situation so full of horror as Medea's in the former scene. The truth is, that it appears to be introduced expressly with the singing, to soften the impression that scene had made upon the minds of the audience ; and to prepare them, by a gentle and imperceptible passage, for still greater efforts of passion. For, as Boileau says, speaking of him who writes a tragedy :

" Il faut qu'en cent façons pour plaire il se replie,
 " Que tantôt il s'éleve, & tantôt s'humilie:
 " Qu'en nobles sentimens il soit par tout fécond :
 " Qu'il soit aisé, solide, agréable, profond :
 " Que de traits surprenans sans cesse il nous réveille,
 " Qu'il courre dans ses vers de merveille en merveille,
 " Et que tout ce qu'il dit facile à retenir
 " De son ouvrage en nous laisse un long souvenir.
 " Ainsi la Tragédie marche, agit, s'explique."

Such is the art of Euripides ; and I do not at all doubt, but that his severest censurers will allow him part at least of those talents which Despreaux here requires in a tragick poet ; and that in particular which he wishes all poets should possess.

" Heureux qui dans ces vers scait d'une voix légere
 " Passer du grave au doux, du plaisant au sévere."

A C T V.

Medea, impatient to know the effect of her presents, which she thinks too long delayed, sees on a sudden one of Jason's servants, in whose looks, full of terror and amazement, she discovers that all is grief and desolation in the palace. This man, through some remains of tenderness for his former queen, cries out, as soon as he perceives her, " Fly, unhappy princess, fly. Oh! what more dost thou wish for? Glauca and Creon expire, the victims of thy barbarous gifts." Medea, to compleat her joy, obliges him to tell her every circumstance of this horrid scene. " To know, says she, " that their punishment has been severe, will increase my satisfaction." The officer relates what had happened in the following manner: " When we saw Jason leading his sons into the nuptial apartment, we began to hope for a happy reconciliation: the report of which had spread all over the court. The courtiers crowd about the young princes, some seized their hands, others embraced them; myself, transported with joy, followed them into the women's apartment. The princess accosted Jason with a smiling aspect, but as soon as she perceived his children, she hastily turned away her eyes, as if they had beheld something horrible. However, Jason soon disarmed her indignation with these words: Listen no longer to thy resentment, princess; why dost thou turn away thy eyes? hate not the children, if thou lovest the father, but deign to receive the presents they bring thee, and obtain their pardon of the king: let these children experience the tenderness thou hast for their father. The sight of the presents softened the princess; she promised all he desired, and, delighted with the extraordinary magnificence of the robe and crown, she was impatient for the departure of the princes, that she might adorn herself with them. With her own hands she put the crown upon her head, and consulted her glass in what manner to dispose her flowing hair: she tasted a secret pleasure in beholding herself thus magnificently arrayed: she rose from her chair, she walked about the room, often gazing in the glass, with airs that shewed the vanity with which she was intoxicated; but in a few moments what a frightful change ensued! We perceived her countenance alter, her knees smote each other, and she sunk upon her throne. One of her women, who thought she was struck by the God Pan, or some other offended divinity, terrified and amazed, called aloud for assistance: and now we saw the foam gather

" ther on her lips, her eyes looked wild, a deadly paleness over-
" spread her face, she sent forth dreadful cries. The whole court
" was in the utmost consternation : her frightened women ran here
" and there, not knowing what they did. Some flew to acquaint
" the king, others to tell Jason the dreadful accident ; mean time,
" the princess, stretched on her bed, lay without voice or motion ;
" when on a sudden she breathed a sigh, and opened her eyes ; but
" it was only to struggle with new torments ; for from the coronet
" broke forth flames that surrounded her head, while the poisoned
" robe consumed her body. The flames now spreading all over
" her, she would have fled from herself ; she shook her hair, she en-
" deavoured to tear off the fatal crown. Vain efforts ! the fire grew
" fiercer ; at length she sunk again upon her bed, her beauteous
" form so altered that she could scarce be known but by a father.
" The lustre of her eyes was gone ; her very hue was changed to
" ashy paleness ; streams of blood flowed down her ghastly face ;
" her hairs dropt off like sparks from a flaming brand ; the starting
" bones were seen. Her attendants, not daring to touch her burn-
" ing body, stand at a distance, scarce able to bear the sight of it.
" At length her wretched father entered ; and with doleful shrieks
" threw himself by the body of his daughter, ignorant, alas ! how
" fatal this last embrace would be to him : he held her fast clasp-
" ed in his arms. Oh, my unhappy child, cried he, whom the
" Gods have so cruelly struck, to precipitate my old age into the
" tomb ; for I will follow thee, my daughter to the shades ! After
" these first transports of grief, he attempted to rise ; but his daugh-
" ter's fatal ornaments stuck close to his body, like the ivy to the
" laurel. In vain he endeavoured to tear them thence ; his burn-
" ing flesh came off at every trial ; his strength abandoned him,
" and he expired holding his daughter in his arms : and now both
" father and daughter lie extended on the earth ; a spectacle
" capable of moving even your heart." Here the officer concludes
his narration, advising Medea to make her escape instantly. He
adds a sentence, or a reflection, upon the instability of human things ;
and the Chorus pity the king's daughter, who had suffered the
punishment due to Jason.

It is here that Medea, when the officer is departed, fortifies her-
self in her resolution to execute her last vengeance, which it had
cost her such agonies to think of. " But now, she says, it is become
" impossible to preserve her children from the rage of Creon's
" friends, who will doubtless revenge his death. They must die
" inevi-

"inevitably; and it is a mother's part to pierce their tender bosoms.
 "Death will come more gently from her hand than from that
 "of an enemy." This is the same thought and the same
 verses repeated. "Well then, my heart, arm thyself with cruelty;
 "why this pang? no longer defer a horrid but necessary crime.
 "Take this poniard, oh hand fated to guilt! take it, and cut short
 "the thread of two wretched children's lives. Ah, cease to trem-
 "ble; but forget that thou art going to stain thyself with
 "thy own blood. Oh, my sons! oh dear torturing remem-
 "brances! And am I then a mother? but, no, I will forget, for this
 "day at least, that I am so: tears and mourning shall have their
 "turn; my sons will be no less dear to me, but I shall be more
 "miserable."

Here she retires in order to execute her design. The Chorus, full of terror and amazement, shriek aloud, and conjure the sun, Medea's ancestor, to stop the rage of this inhuman mother. They afterwards address Medea herself: they make use of threats, but all to no purpose. They hear the cries of her children, like victims struck by the hand of the sacrificer, and endeavouring to avoid new wounds. The Corinthian ladies endeavour in vain to force an entrance; they have recourse to tears and cries, to awaken compassion in this other Ino; for this is the name they give her, because * Ino had thrown herself into the sea with her son Melicerta. This history, short as it is, seems cold and spiritless, in a scene so full of passion; and amidst deeds so dreadful as those which Medea is acting.

In the mean time Jason comes to punish Medea for her cruelty; but his chief solicitude is to preserve his sons from the vengeance of the royal family, and the Corinthians. He is informed that his children is slain by the hands of their mother; and, wild with grief and rage, he attempts to break open the doors; but Medea raises herself in the air in a chariot, which the Sun her ancestor had given her. Horace † and Seneca ‡ say that this chariot was

* Ino was the daughter of Cadmus and Harmonia. Inflamed with rage against Athamas, her husband, who had killed her son, Learchus, and seized with a divine fury,

as the poet says, she threw herself into the sea, with her other son, Melicerta. Medea imitated her but in part.

† Hæc delibutis ulta donis pellicem
Serpente fugit alite. Hor. Epod. 3.

‡ Squamosa gemini colla serpentis jugo
Summissa præbent. Senec. Med. v. 1021.

drawn by winged dragons. Euripides is silent concerning this circumstance, which is indeed of little importance.

Notwithstanding that the unravelling of this play, as well as the deaths of Glauca and Creon, is effected by magick, yet it produces a very interesting situation; which is the parting of Jason and Medea. She bids him cease his fruitless efforts to stop her. Corneille has taken the sense of this speech in the following lines:

“ Que fert de t'emporter à ces vaines furies?
 “ Epargne, cher époux, les efforts que tu perds :
 “ Voi les chemins de l'air qui me sont tous ouverts ;
 “ C'est par-là que je suis, & que je t'abandonne”

“ * Barbarous mother, exclaims Jason; oh monster, execrable
 “ to Gods and men! how wert thou able to plunge a dagger
 “ into the bosoms of thy children, to strike me in them and through
 “ them? how canst thou behold the light after such a deed?” He
 afterwards reproaches her with all her crimes. “ What madness
 “ possest me, says he, to bring such a fury with me into Greece?”
 Medea tells him, that she had still too many instances of treachery
 to charge him with, tho' the Gods were not witnesses of the con-
 duct of each of them. “ What! pursues she, was it fit that I
 “ should suffer an ungrateful wretch to be happy and triumph in
 “ his infidelity? No, call me barbarian, load me with names more
 “ hateful still; it is satisfaction enough for me that I am revenged,
 “ and I enjoy thy misery.” This is the sense at least of her
 answer.

JASON. Cruel woman, thou hast revenged thyself at thy own
 expence.

MEDEA. It matters not at what price, so a perfidious traitor
 laughs not at the injury he has done Medea.

JASON. My dear children, to what a mother did you owe your
 birth! (*Here it must be observed that he sees their bleeding bodies in
 their mother's chariot.*)

MEDEA. My dear children, it was your father's perfidy that
 robbed you of your lives.

* Gasper Steblin, a commentator, gives us a list of the ten reproachful epithets that Jason uses in this scene to Medea. Certainly they are not of importance enough to deserve this exactness. However these

epithets of reproach are much the same with those which are suffered at present on the stage; and we cannot without injustice charge it as a fault to Euripides, the making use of them.

JASON. But my hand was not stained with their blood.

MEDEA. It did worse. It betrayed me.

JASON. Ought so small a crime to have been thus cruelly punished?

MEDEA. Perfidious man, darest thou call the outrage I have suffered from thee small? dost thou know the heart of a woman?

Jason demands the bodies of the children at least, that he may bury them; but this Medea refuses: she tells him, that she will hide these sad remains in the temple of Juno, that her enemies may not wreak their fury on them. She adds also, that she will institute festivals and solemn expiations at Corinth, to appease their manes. It was these festivals and these expiations, probably, which occasioned the common opinion, that the Corinthians had slaughtered these children at the altar, where Medea had left them when she fled from Corinth, according to another tradition. As for her, she says, Athens shall behold her again in the quality of wife to Egeus. She then foretells Jason, that after having lived long enough to feel the whole weight of his misfortunes, he should perish at length under the wreck of the Argonaut's vessel; which happened accordingly; for as he lay sleeping one day under the shelter of this ship, it fell on his head and killed him.

JASON. May vengeance and the furies reserve for thee the punishment due to parricides.

MEDEA. What God, thinkest thou, will hear the prayers of a perfidious and impious wretch like thee?

Medea closes her farewell by this bitter irony: "Go pay the last duties to thy bride; thou feelest not yet all thy miseries. Time and old age shall revenge me daily." Yet there are some tender sentiments; as for example, Jason exclaims, "Oh my loved children!"

MEDEA. Yes, beloved by their mother, but not by thee.

JASON. Inhuman woman! and yet thou murderedst them.

MEDEA. I killed them to punish thee.

JASON. Alas! must I not embrace them at least.

MEDEA. This tenderness comes too late; didst thou not banish them?

JASON. I conjure thee, in the name of the Gods, grant me this melancholy consolation.

MEDEA. No, all thy efforts are fruitless.

Jason, delivered over to his despair, calls the Gods to witness to this barbarous refusal; and indeed nothing could be more affecting,

ing, according to the notions the ancients entertained concerning the dead, and the rites of burial. We have an example of a refusal of this kind in the Phœnicians. This was the last stroke which Medea reserved for her ungrateful husband; and this compleats the tragic action. Medea, after having beheld him languishing thus under her protracted revenge, flies away in her enchanted Chariot*.

* Such is the tragedy of Euripides, founded upon the Grecian history of his time; or rather, upon the fabulous traditions: for, according to Herodotus, the Persians related the rape of Medea, by Jason, in a manner very different from the Greeks, as they did of all those which laid the foundation of an irreconcileable hatred between the Greeks and the Asiaticks. The first rape, say the Persians, was that of Io, the daughter of Inachus, king of Argos, by some Phœnician merchants, who carried her into Egypt. The second rape was that of Europa, the daughter of the king of Tyre, who was

carried off by the Cretans, to revenge themselves on the Phœnicians. Medea's was the third; she was carried away from Colthos by Jason, and demanded, to no purpose, by the king her father, who alleged the rape of Io, for which they had received no reparation, as a reason for denying his request. In the following age, Paris, the son of Priam, stole Helena from the Greeks, who were the first that took revenge for an injury which the Asiaticks had always put up with. Hence arose that reciprocal hatred, which in after-ages filled Europe and Asia with the flames of war.

M E D E A.

A

TRAGEDY by SENECA.

ACT the FIRST.

THE first act consists of two scenes, a soliloquy spoken by Medea, and another by the first person of the Chorus. Medea explains the subject, by addressing her prayers to the Gods, the revengers of violated faith: she conjures them to punish her perfidious husband. P. Corneille has translated this scene almost word for word, as he has done all those of Seneca's, which were in the least degree interesting. I shall give the reader Seneca's first scene of the Medea, as it is improved by this great Poet.

“ Souverains protecteurs des loix de l'hyménée,
“ Dieux, garans de la foi que Jason m'a donnée,
“ Vous qu'il prit à témoin d'une immortelle ardeur
“ Quand par un faux serment il vainquit ma pudeur, &c.”

Seneca names all these Gods, which his judicious imitator does not.

“ Et vous troupe sçavante en noires barbaries,
“ Filles de l'Achéron, pestes, Larves, furies,
“ Fieres sœurs, si jamais notre commerce étroit
“ Sur vous & vos serpens me donna quelque droit
“ Sortez de vos cachots avec les mêmes flammes,
“ Et les mêmes tourmons dont vous gênez les ames.”

Seneca says, “ Come from Hell, such as thou appearedst at my marriage.” This is stronger.

“ Ap-

" Apportez-moi du fond des antres de Mégére
 " La mort de ma rivale & celle de son pere,
 " Et si vous ne voulez mal servir mon courroux,
 " Quelque chose de pis pour mon perfide époux.
 " Qu'il courre vagabond de province en province;
 " Qu'il fasse lâchement la Cour à chaque prince
 " Banni de tous côtés, sans bien & sans appui,
 " Accablé de frayeur, de misere, d'ennui, &c."

In the Latin poet, Medea says a great deal more, yet in fewer words, upon the article of Jason's inconstancy; for when she would implore of the Gods a severer vengeance on him, she expresses herself thus: *Let him live.* It is true that she afterwards adds what Corneille makes her say; but perhaps it would have been sufficient if she had only said, *Let him live wretched:* or rather not to have added any thing at all, that the sublimity of that stroke might not have been weakened.

We may from these passages judge of the whole scene. Here then the tragic action probably begins. The raging Medea, in order to be revenged on Jason, determines to punish her rival, whom Seneca calls Creusa; and to sacrifice Creon also, the father of that princess. The Chorus, without informing us who they are, (for we only guess that they are Corinthian ladies) sing a kind of nuptial hymn in honour of the new-married pair. Such is the first act of Seneca's Medea, which is certainly greatly inferior to that of Euripides.

A C T II.

The preparations for Jason's nuptials add new stings to the jealousy and rage of Medea: here she gives us a declamatory speech, as in the preceding act. But her tenderness is awakened at the same time, and she seeks for reasons to justify an unfaithful but still-loved husband. It is certain that these reasons are specious enough; for Seneca ingeniously supposes, that Jason could no otherwise avoid death, than by accepting the hand of Creusa. Acastus, the son of Pelias, had threatened to lay Corinth waste, unless Creon would deliver Jason and Medea into his hands. Jason had the good fortune to find favour with Creon, who promised to protect him, provided he would marry his daughter; but to appease Acastus, it was necessary that Medea should be delivered up to him. Medea therefore is the only state-victim which is sacrificed in Seneca.

Seneca. This happy artifice has been imitated by Corneille, and is the hinge upon which the French as well as the Latin tragedy turns. Thus, in Seneca's second act, Medea secretly acquits Jason of any crime, and satisfies herself with her intended revenge upon Creusa, because she is her rival; and upon Creon, because he violates the laws of hospitality. Medea's confidant exhorts her mistress to conceal her rage at least; and here we have that beautiful passage, which Corneille has rendered with all its faults*.

“ NERINE. Forcez l'aveuglement dont vous êtes séduite
 “ Pour voir en quel état le ciel vous a reduite.
 “ Votre païs vous haï, votre époux est sans foi :
 “ Dans un si grand revers que vous restet'il ?
 “ ME'DEE. Moi : Moi, dis-je, & c'est assez.
 “ NERINE. Quoi, vous seule, madame !
 “ ME'DEE. Oui, tu vois en moi seule & le fer & la flâme,
 “ Et la terre & la mer, & l'enfer, & les cieux,
 “ Et le sceptre des rois, & la feudre des dieux.”

This word *moi*, which to Despreaux appeared so sublime, and so little of a piece with what follows, as running unnecessarily into length, which makes the thought cold and languishing, is copied exactly from the Latin poet.

“ NUTRIX. Abiere Colchi, conjugis nulla est fides :
 “ Nihilque supereft opibus è tantis tibi.
 “ MEDEA. Medea supereft. Hic mare & terras vides,
 “ Ferrumque & ignes, & Deos & fulmina.”

At length Medea consents to save herself by flight; but determines to make her farewell bloody, and to leave dreadful tokens of her vengeance behind her.

Creon, who had doomed her to banishment, comes to press her to quit his dominions instantly. This scene is an imitation of Euripides, and if it has less simplicity, yet it has much more wit. Corneille has done little more than translate it, without omitting any of its faults or beauties. Here follows some passages of it; we will begin with the faulty ones:

“ Quoi, je te vois encore! avec quelle impudence
 “ Peux-tu sans t'effrayer soutenir ma présence ?
 “ Ignores-tu l'arrêt de ton bannissement ?
 “ Fais-tu si peu de cas de mon commandement ?

“ Voyez

* P. Corn. Médée, Act. I.

“ V oyez comme elle s’enfle, & d’orgueil & d’audace :
 “ Ses yeux ne sont que feu, ses regards que menace.
 “ Gardes, empêchez-la de s’approcher de moi.”

This last line, in particular, is unworthy of a king.

“ Arcete famuli tactu & accessu procul.”

Euripides has not given this unworthy fear to Creon; but in the following lines there are beauties which belong wholly to Seneca and Corneille, and which have no foundation in the Greek poet. Creon reproaches Medea with having betrayed her country; she answers,

“ Si j’eusse eû de l’horreur de tant d’énormes fautes
 “ Que devenoient Jason & tous vos Argonautes ?
 “ Sans moi ce vaillant chef que vous m’avez ravi.
 “ Eût peri le premier, & tous l’auroient suivi.—
 “ Je vous les ai sauvés, je vous les cede tous :
 “ Je n’en veux qu’un pour moi: n’en soyez point jaloux.
 “ Pour de si bons effets laissez moi l’infidelle:
 “ Il est mon crime seul, si je suis criminelle.
 “ Aimer cet inconstant, c’est tout ce que j’ai fait;
 “ Si vous me punissez, rendez-moi mon forfait.”

These sentiments are indeed rather sparkling than just; but yet they are ingenious; and this kind of ornament may sometimes give lustre to a tragic scene, especially when it is wrought by the hand of a master, such as the great Corneille: however I will venture to assert, although I run the hazard of being blamed by the passionate admirers of that truly sublime genius, that he seems often to run too eagerly in pursuit of what is called wit; which is the cause that he sometime falls into an affectation of it. His tragedies abound with whole scenes in this false taste: throughout the whole tragedy of Horace, in which, nevertheless, there are many sublime passages, we find him playing upon the names of sister, and lover, brother, and husband, Alba, and Rome. It is Seneca and Lucan who have formed this turn of wit in P. Corneille; yet is he happy, that in the strength of his own genius he found a sufficient resource to hinder him from slavishly following those whom he condescended to look upon as his masters, and has chosen for his guides.

At length Creon grants Medea a single day to prepare for her departure, as Euripides makes him do: the Chorus, as usual, sing an ode; the subject of which is, the voyage of the Argonauts. In this ode there is a parody of these verses of Horace,

* " Olli robur & æs triplex
 " Circa pectus erat qui fragilem truci
 " .Commisit pelago ratem."

A C T III.

The third act begins, like the preceding one, with a conversation between Medea and her confidant. In this scene there is nothing new. Medea is furious, and her confidant endeavours to calm her imprudent transports. The visit which Jason makes her is not well prepared; for Seneca had no taste for these delicacies of the drama. However, the interview between Jason and Medea is full of beauties. There is even a judicious contrivance in it, which Euripides has not employed; or, at least, has not employed so happily. Jason's infidelity to Medea is, in some measure, extenuated by the necessity he was under of either marrying Creusa, or of suffering his children to be delivered up to Acastus, who threatened to put them to death, as well as Jason. Corneille has taken this whole scene from Seneca, with this ingenious artifice, which enables Jason to support his part in this conversation tolerably well, and keeps up Medea's dignity. She says to him as in Euripides:

" Où me renvoyez-vous si vous me bannissez;
 " Irai je sur le phare, où j'ai trahi mon pere,
 " Appaiser de mon sang les manes de mon frere;
 " Irai-je en Thessalie où le meurtre d'un roi
 " Pour victime aujourd'hui ne demande que moi.
 " Prodigue de mon sang, honte de ma famille,
 " Aussi cruelle sœur, que déloyale fille,
 " Ces titres glorieux plaisoient à mes amours:
 " Je les pris sans horreur pour conserver tes jours."

These last lines have still greater force in Seneca. "I carried away with me, when I fled, nothing but the scattered limbs of

* Horace, Ode III. l. 1.

my brother Absyrtus, who was slaughtered by these hands. For thee I murdered him; for thee I have sacrificed my country, my father, my fame; such was my portion. Restore me what I brought thee."

*Nil exul tuli
Nisi fratriis artus: hoc quoque impendi tibi
Tibi patria cessit, tibi pater, frater, pudor,
Hoc dote nups. Redde fugienti sua.*

These Lines also are copied from Euripides.

JASON. *Objicere crimen quod potes tandem mibi?*
MEDEA. *Quodcumque feci.*

MEDE'E. "Oui je te les reproche, & de plus--"

JASON. "Quels forfaits?"

MEDE'E. "La trahison, le meurtre, & tous ceux que j'ai faits.

And the following ones.

JASON. *Hinc rex & illuc.*

MEDEA. *Est & bis major metus Medea.*

JASON. "Il est aisé de fuir: mais il n'est pas facile

"Contre deux Rois aigris de trouver un asyle.

"Qui leur résistera s'ils viennent à s'unir.

MEDE'E. "Qui me résistera si je te veux punir?"

Medea being forced to submit to exile, demands her children at least; Jason cannot resolve to part with pledges so dear to him; upon which Medea says,

Sic gnatos amat.

Bene est: tenetur; vulneri patuit locus.

"Il aime ses enfants ce courage inflexible:

"Son foible est découvert: par eux il est sensible,

"Par eux mon bras armé d'une juste rigueur

"Va trouver des chemins à lui percer le cœur."

Jason retires, and now Medea forms the design of poisoning, by her magical arts, the robe and coronet, which she designs for presents to her rival. The Chorus seem to be witnesses of all this; at least they are present at great part of the theatrical action, and are acquainted with the scheme of revenge formed by Medea.

I mention this expressly, to shew that P. Corneille is mistaken when he gives it as his opinion, that the Chorus are not with Medea when she takes those horrid resolutions against her rival; yet it is certain that the interlude of this act and the following one turn upon the rage and the menaces of this princess, and give room for a great number of moral sentences, which are of no use, and extremely tiresome, upon the rage of injured wives.

There is a very striking difference between the Chorus of Seneca, and that of Euripides. In the latter poet, the Chorus is composed of Medea's friends, whom her artifice and her misfortunes engaged in her interests; she might securely therefore intrust them with her schemes of revenge. But it is not so in Seneca, where the Chorus do not appear to have any connection with Medea; and are only introduced to fill up the void between each act: and from the very first act, they are so far from pitying Medea, that they celebrate by songs the nuptials of Jason and Creusa. This difference fully removes the objections that are made to Corneille.

A C T IV.

The fourth act is very remarkable, as well for the extravagance which it is full of, as for the beauty of a scheme that is executed very ill. It consists of two scenes. In the first the confidant enters to acquaint the audience, that her mistress is employed in magical preparations. But how does she tell them this? by the description of a great number of serpents, insects, and monsters, which Medea had in an instant collected from the two extremities of the world. The confidant afterwards describes the venomous herbs she makes use of, without forgetting, I believe, to name the country where any one was to be found. We meet with this kind of geographical description in other authors of that age: it was the prevailing taste. Seneca has taken all this from a passage in Ovid, who, in the seventh book of his Metamorphoses, falls exactly into the same fault. It is a great deal of learning thrown away.

" Postquam evocavit omne serpentum genus
 " Congerit in unum frugis infastæ mala;
 " Quæcunque generat invius saxis Erix,
 " Qua fert opertis hiems perpetuâ jugis
 " Sparsus cruento Caucasus Promethei;
 " Pharetrâque pugnax Medus, aut Parthus levis;

" Et

“ Et queis sagittas divites Arabes linunt :
“ Aut quos sub axe frigido succos legunt
“ Lucis Suevi nobiles Herciniis.
“ Quodcumque tellus vere nidifico creat ;
“ Aut rigidi cum jam bruma discussit decus
“ Nemorum, & nivali cuncta constringit gelu.
“ Quodcumque gramen flore mortifero viret,
“ Dirusve tortis succus in radicibus
“ Causas nocendi gignit, atrectat manu.
“ Aemonius illas contulit pestes Athos ;
“ Has Pindus ingens ; illa Pangei jugis
“ Teneram cruentâ falce depositi comam :
“ Has aluit altum gurgitem tigris premens ;
“ Danubius illas : has per arentes plagas
“ Tepidis Hydaspes Gemmifer currens aquis,
“ Nomenque terris qui dedit Bætis suis
“ Hesperia pulsans maria languenti vado, &c *.”

“ Sublimis rapitur. Subjectaque Thessala Tempe
“ Despicit, & Creteis regionibus applicat angues:
“ Et quas Ossa tulit, quas altus Pelion herbas,
“ Othrysque, Pindusque, & Pindo major Olympus
“ Perspicit, et placita partim radice revellit;
“ Partim succidit curvamine falcis ahena,
“ Multa quoque Apidani placuerunt gramina campis,
“ Multa quoque Amphrysi: neque eras immunis, Enipeu:
“ Nec non Peneae, nec non Spercheides undæ
“ Contribuere aliquid, juncosaque litora Bæbes.
“ Carpit & Euboicâ vivax anthedone gramen
“ Nondum mutato vulgatum corpore Glauci, &c.†.”

Here are the herbs that were gathered to restore Æson to youth
In the following lines we have the composition of the drugs, and
the magical preparation.

- “ Interea validum posito medicamen aheno
- “ Fervet & exultat, spumisque tumentibus albet.
- “ Illic Hæmoniâ radices valle resectas
- “ Seminaque floresque & suecos incoquit acres.

*L. An. Séneca. *Medea*, A. IV. † Ovid. *Met.* 1.7.

K k k 2

"Ad-

" Adjicit extremo lapides Oriente petitos,
 " Et quas Oceani refluum mare lavit Arenas.
 " Addit & exceptas lunâ per nocte pruinias;
 " Et strygis infames ipsis cum carnibus alas;
 " Inque virum soliti vultus mutare ferinos
 " Ambigui prosecta lupi. Nec defuit illic
 " Squamea Cinyphii tenuis membrana Chelydri,
 " Vivacisque jecur Cervi; quibus insuper addit
 " Ora caputque novem Cornicis saecula passæ, &c*."

However, Ovid may be excused for so frequently taking occasion to display his learning, since it was his express design to compose a work which was at once to please and to instruct by exact and minute descriptions; yet Seneca's pedantry cannot be palliated; his business was to animate and delight the spectators. The drama is not a place for historical details, and geographical descriptions.

But we will now return to the confidant, who continuing to take Ovid for a guide, represents Medea as extracting the blood and poison of these serpents; but this is painted in a manner so shocking, that it raises more horror than delight. "I hear her," adds she; her songs have already made the whole universe tremble."

Accordingly Medea comes upon the stage to finish her incantations. It is not so much a magick charm as an infernal howling; for so I call that long series of swelling verses, which Medea rather howls out than speaks: she is the sybil of the Pharsalia, or something still more horrid, if it be possible.

" Voi comme ces serpens à mon commandement
 " D'Afrique jusqu'ici n'ont tardé qu'un moment,
 " Et contraints d'obéir à mes clamours funestes
 " Ont sur ce don fatal vomi toutes leurs pestes.
 " L'amour à tous mes sens ne fut jamais si doux,
 " Que ce triste appareil à mon esprit jaloux.
 " Ces herbes ne sont pas d'une vertu commune:
 " Moi-même en les cueillant je fis pâlir la lune,
 " Quand les cheveux flottans, le bras, & le pied nû.
 " J'en dépouillai jadis un climat inconnu."

Corneille has spared us at least the geographical description of several countries.

* Ovid. Met. l. 7.

" Voi

" Voi mille autres venins. Cette liqueur épaisse
 " Méle du sang de l'Hydre avec celui de Nefle.
 " Python eut cette langue, & ce plumage noir
 " Est celui qu'une Harpye en fuyant laissa choir.
 " Par ce tison Althée assouvit sa colere
 " Trop pitoyable sœur, & trop cruelle mere.
 " Ce feu tomba du ciel avecque Phaëton ;
 " Cet autre vient des flots du pierreux Phlegeton.
 " Et celui-ci jadis remplit en nos contrées
 " Des Taureaux de Vulcain les gorges ensouffrées.
 " Enfin tu ne vois-là, poudres, racines, eaux,
 " Dont le pouvoir mortel n'ouvrit mille tombeaux.
 " Ce present deceptif a bû toute leur force,
 " Et bien mieux que mon bras vengera mon divorce."

It requires a pencil as delicate and as judicious as that of Virgil to paint things so horrid in themselves. Here follows an example of this sort of descriptions, which is not foreign to the subject of the Medea. The poet is speaking of Circe, another enchantress.

" Elle invoque à grands cris tous les Dieux du Ténare,
 " Les Parques, Nemesis, Cerbère, Phlegeton .
 " Et l'inflexible Hécate, & l'infame Alecton.
 " Sur un autel sanglant l'affreux bucher s'allume ;
 " La foudre dévorante aussi-tôt le consume.
 " Mille noires vapeurs obscurcissent le jour :
 " Les astres de la nuit interrompent leur course ;
 " Les fleuves étonnés remontent vers leur source,
 " Et Pluton même tremble en son obscur séjour.
 " Sa voix redoutable
 " Trouble les enfers :
 " Un bruit formidable
 " Gronde dans les airs:
 " Un voile effroyable
 " Couvre l'univers:
 " La terre tremblante
 " Frémit de terreur :
 " L'onde turbulente,
 " Mugit de fureur ;
 " La lune sanglante
 " Recule d'horreur.

" Dans

" Dans le sein de la mort ses noires enchantemens
 " Vont troubler le repos des ombres.
 " Les inanes effrayés quittent leurs monumens ;
 " L'air retentit au loin de leurs cavernes sombres
 " Mêlent à leurs clamours d'horribles sifflemenrs.
 " Inutiles efforts ! &c."

Seneca has shewn far less judgment in his Medea. Virgil has described the fatal presages of Dido's death; presages which have all the dreadful solemnities of Medea's enchantments; but they move the heart without disgusting it. His images have a certain majestic horror in them very different from the wild fancies of Seneca and Corneille. But Corneille, although the greatest poet of our times, has suffered himself to be imposed upon, by the veneration in which this tragedy of Seneca was held; and indeed it is the finest of those that are attributed to this author.

But to return to Medea: She gives the robe and the coronet to her sons, and commands them to present these gifts to Creusa; but all this is neither connected nor well prepared. The Chorus speak less, and with more propriety, of Medea's rage than in the former interlude.

A C T V.

An officer comes to acquaint them that the enchanted presents have consumed the king and princess; and likewise, that the whole palace is inflames, so that a general conflagration of the whole city is apprehended. The Chorus answer, that they must extinguish the flames with water; but the officer tells them, that water serves as food only for this extraordinary fire.

CHORUS. " Unda flamas opprimat.

NUNT. " Alit unda flamas, &c."

A puerility which I have taken notice of, to shew, that those writers who have their heads above the clouds, sometimes fall to the ground in a most deplorable manner. In the following scene there is some very beautiful passages: Medea, instead of making her escape, declares, that although she had already left Corinth, she would return again to enjoy her vengeance. The punishment of Creon and his daughter holds the place of a happy marriage to her. *Nuptias spatio novas.*

She animates herself to compleat these horrors by the murder of her children, to which all that she had yet done was only the prelude.

“ Prolusit dolor
“ Per ista nostra.”

But she dare not avow yet to herself the horrid deed she is meditating.

“ Nescio quid ferox
“ Decrevit animus intus, & nondum fibi
“ Audet fateri.”

She feels the struggles between nature and revenge.

“ Immolons avec joie
“ Ceux qu'à me dire adieu. Creüse me renvoie.
“ Ils viennent de sa part, ils ne sont plus à moi:
“ Mais, ils sont innocens ! aussi l'étoit mon frere.
“ Ils sont trop criminels d'avoir Jason pour pere.”

*Scelus est Jason genitor, & majus scelus
Medea mater. Occidant, non sunt mei.
Pereant, mei sunt---Crimine & culpa carent.
Sunt innocentia fateor; & frater fuit.*

But after all these beautiful sentiments, there follow some, extravagant in the highest degree. “ Why, cries she, have I not as many children as Niobe? I have two few to satisfy my vengeance.” *Sterilis in penis fui.* “ but at least I have enough to appease the injured shades of a father, and a brother.” She fancies she beholds the Furies and the ghost of Absyrtus. “ Leave to me, says she, the care of revenging thee; this hand, this poniard will do it without thy aid.” At length she hears the tumult of arms; she ascends a balcony, and resolves to massacre her children publickly: should she do it in secret, she would lose her dear-bought revenge. She would shew the people what Medea is capable of.

“ Non in occulto tibi est
“ Perdenda virtus. Approba populo manum.”

This is a direct offence against that precept of Horace, which forbids Medea to murder her children upon the stage.

“ Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet.”

Jason.

Jason enters, eager to revenge the deaths of his bride and her father, and Medea without seeing him, utters these words :

“ I have recovered my scepter, my father, my brother, my honour, and the fatal fleece. Oh favourable Deities! Oh happy day! Oh glorious triumph! (*bere she kills one of her children*) My crimes are compleat, but not my vengeance.” Again she fortifies herself in her cruel resolutions; but in an instant she repents of the horrid deed, then rejoices in it, and her joy increases at the sight of Jason. “ There wanted only this, says she, to my revenge, that he should be a spectator of it.”

“ Deerat hoc unum mihi
“ Spectator ipse. Nil adhuc factum reor.
“ Quicquid sine ipso fecimus sceleris perit.”

“ Hitherto all I have done is nothing. Alas! that crime which
“ I have this moment spared him the sight of, is lost to me.”

This is a refinement of rage so extraordinary, that no judgment can be made of it; and which Corneille durst not imitate. But Seneca carries it farther still. Medea shews her husband one of her sons, already murdered; and the other ready to receive the stroke she prepares to give him. The poniard is lifted up, Jason conjures her to spare his only child, and to strike him. Medea excites this paternal tenderness still more, that she may enjoy the barbarous pleasure of tormenting him. “ I would wound thee, says she to him, in the most sensible part.” “ Am I not sufficiently punished by the death of one son? replies Jason. “ No, resumes Medea; if I could have been satisfied with the sacrifice of one, I would have spared them both. Two sons are too few for my revenge. I would with this steel search my bowels for another.”

“ In matre si quod pignus etiamnum latet,
“ Scrutabor ense viscera, & ferro extraham.”

What sentiments! we tremble while we admire them. Jason implores her to suspend, at least, her barbarity for a few moments: she consents to it; but it is only to prolong a father’s agonies. “ Enjoy, says she, enjoy Medea, thy protracted revenge; hasten not thy impious deed; the whole day is before thee, fill up every moment with horror.”

“ Perfruere lento scelere; ne propera, dolor:
“ Meus dies est; tempore accepto utimur.

“ In-

" Inhuman wretch, cries Jason, murder me. 'Tis well, says
" Medea, thou implorest mercy: this is the mercy I give thee,
" (*she stabs her other son.*) Oh vengeance, I have no more sacri-
" fices to make thee! look up, perfidious Jason, and by these
" tokens know thy wife." Here she flies away upon her enchanted
chariot, and Jason concludes the piece with some lines, the most
impious that ever were written. " Go, fly through the vast regi-
ons of the air, and convince mankind that there are no Deities
" above."

" *Testare nullos esse quā veheris Deos.*"

A divine thought, says a certain critic; when assuredly nothing can be less so. Such is this piece, which is one of the most beautiful of the few Latin tragedies we have remaining. It is generally allowed to be the true Seneca's; that is L. Seneca, the philosopher; or his at least who was called the tragic poet. Some critics prefer this to the Medea of Euripides; but it is doing it great honour, even to compare it with the Greek tragedy.

M E D E A.

A

TRAGEDY by P. CORNEILLE.

WE have already given an account, in part, of this tragedy, in the foregoing analysis of Seneca's Medea. All that remains now is, to examine Corneille's plan, that we may see how far he has followed Euripides and Seneca, and in what he differs from them.

A C T I.

It is Pollux who opens the scene. This Argonaut is supposed to have been absent from Greece ever since the conquest of the Golden Fleece, and to be ignorant of all that passed there. Corneille acknowledges that Pollux is a personage introduced merely to hear the subject explained; accordingly he has scarce any other business throughout the whole piece. Jason relates all his adventures to him, and acquaints him with his design of repudiating Medea, to make way for his marriage with the princess of Corinth. This whole narration is copied from Euripides; to which is added, that judicious stroke of Seneca's, which renders Jason in some degree justifiable for quitting Medea, since he was reduced to the necessity of being either unfaithful to her, or of exposing his children to the vengeance of two powerful states, Iolcos, and Colchos; the former irritated by the loss of the Golden Fleece, the latter by the murder of Pelius.

Jason, eager to see his beloved Creusa again, quits Pollux abruptly enough; because, indeed, they have nothing more to say to each other, and no farther information to give the audience; and as it is necessary to create a favourable prejudice for Creusa, she is shewn for a few moments upon the stage, and then disappears at the sight of Medea. Here the tragedy properly begins. I have al-

already quoted part of the scene, which is the same with the first scene of Seneca. Medea, first in a soliloquy, and afterwards in a conversation with her confidant Nerina, takes a resolution to murder Creon and Creusa. This whole act therefore is but a copy of the first act of Seneca. The only difference is, that which is here spoken by several actors, is in the Latin tragedy expressed in a single soliloquy of Medea's.

A C T II.

Medea, in her second entrance, seems determined to spare Jason. Creon insists upon her quitting his dominions immediately; but at her intreaty grants her a day's delay. All this is copied from Seneca: but the episode of Egeus, which we shall come to presently, is entirely of Corneille's invention.

This poet, in his observations upon the Medea, condemns Euripides for introducing Egeus, only to extricate Medea out of her difficulties; and he is in the right. The scene between Egeus and Medea is very short; but the two faults which Corneille claims against most in the Greek poet, seem not to be clearly proved. The first is, that Egeus, although in the court of Creon, makes no mention of having seen him; but the truth is, he speaks equivocally, and says enough to make it be supposed that he saw the king of Corinth immediately upon his arrival; and that, being a stranger, he afterwards came to visit Medea, who he heard was at Corinth, but was ignorant of her late misfortunes. This is evident, from a passage which Corneille seems not to have attended to sufficiently. Egeus assures Medea, that she shall be kindly received at Athens; but he adds, that it will not be proper for him to conduct her thither himself, for fear of giving umbrage to his host. By the word host, he certainly means Creon: therefore we find that Egeus has seen him; there needs no more to put that past a doubt.

The second error, which Corneille charges upon Euripides, is a mere subtlety. "The king of Athens, says he, promises Medea to receive and protect her at Athens; nevertheless, he tells her, that when he leaves Corinth, he will go to Træzen, to consult Pitheus, concerning the meaning of an oracle which had been delivered to him at Delphos. Medea therefore must necessarily be but in a bad situation at Athens while she waited his return, since it was plain that he continued a long time with Pitheus, whose daughter, Æthra, he fell in love with, and left her big with child."

To this I answer, that Egeus's resolution to go to Træzen, in order to be informed of the meaning of the oracle, was antecedent to the promise he made Medea. This princess herself approved of his taking this journey, and is satisfied with obtaining an asylum in the dominions of Egeus, without requiring his presence thiere. Now, an absence which was likely to be so short, considering the design of it, could not expose Medea to any danger at Athens. That Egeus remained a considerable time at Træzen is true, since, without knowing it, he accomplished there the oracle of Delphos; which forbade him, in terms very obscure, and very indecent for an oracle, the commerce which gave place to the birth of Theseus. But this should not be charged upon Euripides as a fault: he makes use of Egeus such as he finds him in the present moment; that is, fully determined to return as soon as possible to Athens: and extremely delighted with the hope Medea had given him, of accomplishing the desire that had carried him to Delphos. This was sufficient for Euripides, without troubling himself to consider whether or not Egeus returned at the appointed time to Athens; for at any rate he was not long absent. This fault, if it be one, is so inconsiderable, that it is not worth mentioning; and Corneille criticised it only to raise the merit of his own episode of Egeus, which he has not been more happy in the management of than Euripides. On the contrary, he shews this old prince in a very ridiculous light, by making him the rival of Jason, and the lover of Creusa. He is afterwards imprisoned, (which is another strange circumstance) on purpose to give Medea an opportunity of delivering him from his fetters; that by conferring this obligation on him, he may secure to her a safe retreat at Athens, and afterwards marry her. However, to speak justly, this whole episode is of no other use but to swell the acts; its effect therefore, is to make the principal action languish, by taking the place of those scenes which are really interesting. But Seneca's tragedy was too short; it must be lengthened; and Egeus is here what the Infanta is in the Cid; a useless character, introduced only to fill up a scene or two. It does not belong to me to censure Corneille; the faults of a great genius ought to be treated with respect. I only condemn that embarrassing necessity which dramatic writers impose upon themselves, of introducing episodes into their tragedies. They would compose five acts, which may take up two or three hours in the representation: They think they have not matter sufficient for this purpose. They furnish themselves with an episode, foreign perhaps to the

this subject; and this they connect with it as well as they can. It must be confessed that their gold is spoiled by this alloy; but say they, it is a necessary evil. How then, I ask, does it happen, that the Greeks have been able to avoid it?

Let us return to Egeus. He is supposed to be in love with Creusa; but the princess has her father's consent to give this superannuated lover a denial. Creusa does this with great civility, as she says; but in effect, it is with scorn enough: so that Egeus, who discovers he is laughed at, forms a scheme to carry off Creusa.

A C T III.

The two first scenes of the third act, namely, that of Nerina alone, and that of Jason with her, gives us but little information; and the whole business of them is to bring about an interview between Jason and Medea: this interview is copied from Seneca, and is extremely beautiful in the French, as well as the Latin poet; but both have fallen into a very considerable fault. Medea, in this scene, suddenly passes, from the most violent rage and bitterest reproaches imaginable, to a feigned tenderness, of which Jason is the dupe. If Jason appears too credulous in Euripides, where however this stratagem of Medea is more artfully prepared by a second conference with her husband, how weak does he shew himself here, when the transition from fury to kindness is so sudden? Besides Jason having no longer any tenderness for Medea cannot say in his own excuse.

“ L'on est aisément dupé par ce qu'on aime,
“ Et l'amour propre engage à se tromper soi-même*.”

The following scene, with which the act concludes, is a conversation between Medea and her confidant, occasioned by a very childish inclination in Creusa. Corneille was not willing to make Medea form the design herself, of sending presents to the new bride, as an acknowledgment for her having obtained a pardon for Jason's children, but supposes that Creusa passionately desires to be possessed of Medea's robe; (a desire very natural to a young woman) and that she intreats Jason to procure it for her, at any rate. This stroke is surely unworthy of the great Corneille, and yet it is upon this that great part of the catastrophe turns. Virgil has also failed in this, by the ridiculous equivocation of the tables which the Trojans were to eat; according to the oracle delivered them by an

* Moliere l'impost. Act IV. Sc. 3.

Harpye. This silly fondness of Creusa for Medea's robe, and her lover's eagerness to gratify it, fills up in this act, as well as the former, two or three scenes which are beneath the dignity of tragedy.

A C T IV.

Medea seizes this opportunity to be revenged on her rival; and this gives room for that magical scene which I have mentioned before. As this scene, which makes up the whole fourth act of the Latin tragedy, was too short to fill the same act of the French one, Corneille here makes the effect of Egeus's menaces break out, and Medea is informed that this prince had made an attempt to carry off Creusa. Nerina is going on with an account of the manner in which the princess was saved; but Medea interrupts her by this line so judiciously placed;

" Je devine la fin ; mon traître l'a sauvée."

She guessed right, for Jason had flown to the assistance of his mistress with Pollux, and had forced her out of the hands of Egeus, who had now made himself a party in the quarrel. Corneille observes, that Medea's ingenious interruption is indeed a stroke of nature. Medea's mind was too much agitated to be capable of listening to a useless detail of circumstances: she orders Nerina to send the poisoned robe instantly to Creusa by the young princes, the sons of Jason.

The second scene is made up of compliments between Creon and Pollux, to shew that the latter has not been wholly inactive, since he has been engaged in a combat for the princess of Corinth. He even endeavours, in the following scene, to infuse some just suspicions into the mind of Creon, on occasion of Medea's present.

" J'eus toujours pour suspects les dons des ennemis;"

Says he, after Virgil.

" Timeo Danaos & dona ferentes."

Creon is with difficulty persuaded to believe that there may be danger in these gifts, which is surprising when he discovered terror at the sight only of Medea.

" Gardes, empêchez-la de s'approcher de moi."

How-

However, he consents to make trial of the robe upon a woman condemned to death ; a useless caution. Medea had provided against such a one; the poison, (as if it had the power of distinguishing) was made only to destroy Creon and Creusa, and to spare all others.

After these two scenes we are shewn Egeus in prison, who pronounces some stanzas much less interesting than those of Polieucta, or of Rodrigue. Corneille, in vain, indeavours to defend this change of place, which is so frequent in his *Medea*. The supposed public square where Euripides and Seneca have laid their scene appears absurd to him; but is this shifting of place less shocking? certainly the spectator finds less difficulty in forgetting that the place where the scene is laid, and where he is fixed, is too much exposed to public view, than to make so many goings and comings, to follow the actors without changing place himself.

Medea afterwards enters, and with her wand causes the doors of Egeus's prison to fly open, and his fetters to fall off. The king of Athens, after having offered his hand and throne to his deliverer, makes his escape from Corinth.

A C T V.

An officer comes out of the palace to carry Jason an account of the fatal effect of the robe. Medea, with a stroke of her wand, fixes him to the ground; and after hearing from him the occasion of his being sent to Jason, with another stroke of her wand restores him to the use of his limbs again. Here is a great deal of magic employed. Surely Euripides has shewn more judgment in the sparing use he has made of Medea's skill in enchantment.

This princess afterwards works herself up to a resolution of killing her children, and retires. The void of this act is then filled up by Creon and Creusa, who appear upon the stage devoured with a fire invisible indeed, but insupportable. Their condition raises more horror than compassion. Creon at length stabs himself with a poniard, to leave the stage free for Jason. The poet has here shewn his judgment in getting rid of Creon; for he perceived that a very tragical situation must necessarily languish when there are more than two speakers. It was for this reason also that he contrives to have Jason out of the way for some time; who, in civility to Pollux, attends him out of the gates of Corinth, because there was no longer any business for him.

Jason at length returns; and this scene becomes striking on account of the situation in which he now finds himself, between a dead

dead father, and a dying wife, whose torments he is not able to relieve. Their farewell is very affecting; but when Creusa is dead, the rage that seizes Jason is quite out of nature. Not satisfied with dooming Medea to the severest punishment, he utters a long and furious invective, (he was not now to declaim, but to act) and deliberates whether he ought not to sacrifice his own children, because they were the bearers of the fatal present, and because they owed their birth to Medea. Such a sally of barbarous fury ought to have been reserved for Medea alone, as Euripides and Seneca have done. It is not natural for a father to be so far transported with rage, as to murder his own children to be revenged on a wife. It is true, indeed, that Jason only deliberates whether he shall commit this deed; and it is in the excess of his grief and despair that it presents itself to his imagination: but this thought in a prince, for whom the poet would excite compassion, raises horror and indignation. When he comes to the palace and sees Medea upon the balcony, and afterwards seated in her flying chariot, he loads her with invectives and execrations. She has killed her children, and congratulates herself upon having been beforehand with Jason; but to this Jason makes no answer: he seems to have forgot he is a father, and only remembers that he is a lover; therefore he takes no notice of the murder of his sons. All his thoughts are employed upon Creusa; and finding it impossible to revenge her death upon Medea, he revenges it upon himself, and falls upon his sword.

I am very sensible that the Medea is not the best performance of P. Corneille: He himself perceived that the style was unequal; and he even observes, that after the writing this tragedy, he acquired an enthusiasm little inferior to the writers he imitated; as in his Pompey, for example. This is true, and posterity will never deny him this justice. It is only to be wished that he had not carried his veneration for Seneca and Lucan so far as to espouse even their faults. But after all, this too close imitation cannot lessen the fame of so great a genius, who always improved upon his models. And if I have examined his tragedy, together with those of the Greek poets, it is because his may be properly compared with them on account of its subject; but in general, the great Corneille may support a comparison carried much farther, to the advantage both of our age and his own.

THE

THE
M E D E A.
OF
L O D O V I C O D O L C E.

OF this tragedy I shall say very little, because it is almost the same with the Medea of Euripides. It is exactly such a translation as the Iphigenia, which has been already mentioned. Dolce has added nothing to his original, but some few inconsiderable embellishments to lengthen the acts. He has even spoiled one passage instead of improving it. It is in the first act, where the Greek poet supposes Medea to be behind the scene. But the Italian conceiving this to be a fault, has thought proper to introduce her upon the stage, and thus loses a beautiful suspension which raises the surprise of the spectator, for a cold declamatory speech. He has also made Medea's little children speak upon the stage, as he makes the young Orestes in Iphigenia; a thing never practised by the ancients. They only introduced them to raise compassion by the sight of their helpless innocence; but their little prattle seemed below the dignity of tragedy. In Euripides, Medea's children speak a few words behind the stage when their mother is pursuing them with her poniard. However, we find in Dolce, as well as in some other Italian poets who have imitated the Greeks, the pathos, and even the simplicity of the ancients, without any conceits, without the antithesis, and injudicious ornament which in general they affect. It wou'd have been well also, if, instead of following so closely the plan of the Greek drama, they had ventured to give Italy an example of daring genius, which our poets have given France, by departing a little from the manner of the Greeks, while they were still governed by the justness of their taste.

*"Vestigia Græca"**"Ausi deferere."*

Horat. Art. Poet.

I have likewise read two other tragedies of Dolce's, one entitled *Progne*, the other *Thyeste*. They are written in the same manner, that is, they are formed upon the plan, and in the spirit of the Greek poets; but without attaining their supreme beauty. The *Thyeste* is a translation from Seneca. Dolce has failed in his attempt to render that beautiful thought which makes so admirable a discovery in the Latin poet. Atreus, after that feast which made the sun start back with horror, presents a cup to Thyestes. Thyestes desires to see his children; and his brother shewing him the remains of those wretched victims, speaks these horrible words.

ATREUS. "Venere; gnatos ecquid agnoscis tuos?"

To which *Thyeste* answers,

"Agnosco fratrem."

Which one of our poets has very happily translated in this manner:

Atré de M. Crebillon.

ATRE'E. "Reconnois-tu ce sang,

THYEST. "Je reconnois mon frere."

Dolce did not perceive the spirit and sublimity of this thought, when he imagined he expressed it by this translation.

ATRE'E. "Conosci queste teste e queste mani?

"Questi son tuoi figlivoli: hora gli abbraccia.

"Che questo è Filisten: questi son gli altri."

THYEST. "Oime, come consenti

"Terra crudel, di sostener ancora

"Tanta sceleritade? &c."

This Lodovico Dolce has written a great many other tragedies, which are all formed upon the plans of the Greek or Latin poets; or rather, the greatest part of them are translations. He is one of the first genius's of the Italian drama.

HYPOLITUS. ALCESTES.

These two tragedies are entirely translated. See the first part of this work.

AN.

A N D R O M A C H E:

A

T R A G E D Y by E U R I P I D E S.

Andromache cannot be named without calling to mind one of the master-pieces of the French theatre. But not to dwell here upon a parallel between Euripides and Racine, as in Iphigenia and Phedra, we need only consider what Racine himself has said in his preface upon the subject of the Andromache of Euripides.

" Although the title of my tragedy is the same with that of Euripides, yet the subject is very different. In Euripides, Andromache's distress arises from the danger of Molossus, a son she had by Pyrrhus, whose life Hermione sought to take away, together with that of his mother: but here Molossus is out of the question. Andromache is still the widow of Hector, and has no son but Astyanax. It appeared to me, that, by modelling my subject in this manner, I acted conformably to the idea we have now of this princess. Almost all those who have heard of Andromache, know her only as the widow of Hector, and the mother of Astyanax. It would be difficult for them to believe that she could love any other husband, or any other son; and I greatly doubt whether the tears of Andromache would have made so powerful an impression upon the audience, if they had flowed for any other son than for him she had by Hector."

Such are the reflections which the delicate taste and exact judgment of Racine suggested to him. The customs of antiquity are too remote from our times, and too different from our manners, to raise compassion in an audience, who are more affected with the misfortunes of a wife faithful to the ashes of her first husband, than to the distress of a captive princess, who has been constrained to partake the bed of the conqueror, rather as a slave than a wife.

This to the Greeks was an affecting distress, who had examples of the like before their eyes; but to us who have not, such a situation would appear shocking. Thus the French Andromache, without taking in other reasons, will always, from the noble motive of her grief, be preferred to the simplicity of the Greek Andromache. I shall not scruple to present her to my readers such as she appeared upon the Athenian stage; but without entering into any comparison with her who has drawn tears from all France, since there is scarce any other resemblance between the two Andromaches, than what there is between two very different paintings of an unhappy mother, who unwillingly became the rival of Hermione.

These two princesses are the principal persons in the Greek drama. Molossus is an infant, only introduced to heighten the compassion of the audience. Menelaus, Peleus, Orestes, are subordinate characters; as are a servant, a confidant, and an officer. Thetis is introduced at last to unravel the intrigue; and the Chorus of Grecian Women to carry it on. The scene is in Phthia, a city in the territories of Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles.

A C T I.

It is Andromache herself who opens the scene. She is discovered at the foot of an altar dedicated to Thetis, near the palace of Pyrrhus. From this asylum, into which she had thrown herself to avoid death, she recounts the history of her misfortunes. She tells how she had beheld the ruin of Troy. Her Hector dragged along the plain by the horses of Achilles; and her son Astyanax thrown from the top of a tower. That being fallen by lot to Pyrrhus, she had been constrained to become the wife of him who had destroyed Ilion; that she had a son by him, her beloved Molossus, who now held the place of her lost Astyanax; but that the jealous Hermione, by espousing the same Pyrrhus, had declared herself the irreconcilable enemy of her and her son. Pyrrhus is supposed to be absent from Phthia; and Hermione, supported by her father Menelaus, takes advantage of his absence to condemn her rival, and Molossus, who is the principal object of her rage, to death.

The Lacedemonian princess, who has no children, conceives a mortal hatred to the son of the foreigner, and to the widow of Hector: she accuses her of being, by the use of magical arts, the cause of that indifference Pyrrhus expresses for her. Andromache, who had secreted Molossus from the attempts of his enemies, and taken sanctuary herself in the Temple of Thetis, there waits for

her rival, who had doomed her to destruction. Such is the situation of this unhappy princess, as explained by the prologue.

One of her women approaches with great caution, and shews the extreme distress to which Andromache is reduced; since it is only by an effect of this woman's extraordinary fidelity that she dares venture to speak to her mistress, and give her secret notice of the new calamities which Menelaus and Hermione were preparing for her.

Andromache, calling her no longer her slave, but her companion, asks her eagerly what fatal news she is come to declare to her.
 " They have resolved, says the attendant, to murder thy son. Oh
 " heavens! resumes the princess, my child is discovered, I am un-
 " done!" It is but too true; and Menelaus comes out of the pa-
 lace to seek his victim himself.

Andromache, thus left defenceless by the absence of Pyrrhus, who is gone to Delphos; and of Peleus, who is in his dominions of Pharsalia, resolves to send to the latter, who is at less distance than Pyrrhus, to intreat him to come with all speed to Phthia, to prevent these barbarous designs. The slave, with some difficulty, undertakes to execute this dangerous commission, which, if discovered, will cost her her life; but her mistress endeavours to remove her fears, by saying to her, " The natural subtilty of thy sex will furnish thee with the means of giving such a colour to thy departure as will deceive Hermione." This is a malignant stroke against women; there are many more of the same kind throughout this piece. Euripides took care to let none escape him.

Andromache, left alone, continues to bewail her misfortunes: she compares her present misery with her former happiness: she even changes her style, and assumes the elegiac strain, which answers to our tragick stanzas; but with more propriety, since elegy took its rise from sighs and tears, which it expresses more happily than our stanzas; and therefore Andromache's complaints cannot be rendered with all their elegance in the French language.
 " Ah miserable Paris, cries she, it was a fury, and not a bride thou broughtest with thee to Troy. She it was that delivered thee, my unfortunate country, a prey to flames, and to the swords of the avenging Greeks. She it was who murdered my beloved Hector, my Hector, whose bleeding corps was barbarously dragged along the field. She was the cause, that veiled like a captive, I was brought to these foreign shores. Ah! how many tears did this sad separation from the ashes of Pergamus and my Hector's tomb
 " cost

" cost these unhappy eyes ? and must I still live to be the slave of " Hermione ? an inhuman rival, who forces me by her cruelty to " take refuge at this altar, and to consume away in grief." Thus speaks Andromache in Racine.

" J'ai vu mon pere mort & nos murs embrasés,
 " J'ai vu trancher les jours de ma famille entiere,
 " Et mon époux sanglant trainé sur la poussiere,
 " Son fils seul avec moi réservé pour les fers.
 " Mais que ne peut un fils ! je respire, je sers*."

At least it is from Euripides, that Racine has drawn that pathetic sorrow of Andromache, who, like the Grecian Andromache, so often repeats the names of Troy and Hector; names which, to poetical ears, have a kind of enchantment: and indeed the ideas of these fabulous times will always have new charms for the imagination. It is to mark this powerful effect of ancient story that Fontaine exclaims,

" Hion, ton nom seul a des charmes pour moi.
 " Lieu secong en sujets propres à notre emploi,
 " Ne verrai-je jamais rien de toi, ni la place
 " De ces murs élevés & détruits par les Dieux,
 " Ni ces champs où courroient la Fureur & l'Audace ;
 " Ni des temps fabuleux enfin la moindre trace
 " Qui pût me présenter l'image de ces lieux!"

Fable 245.

Despréaux, full of the same enthusiasm, expresses himself no less strongly.

" La fable offre à l'esprit mille agréments divers :
 " Là tous les noms heureux semblent nés pour les vers,
 " Ulysse, Agamemnon, Oreste, Idoménée,
 " Hélène, Ménélas, Paris, Hector, Enée.
 " O le plaisir projet d'un Poète ignorant,
 " Qui de tant de Héros va choisir Childebrand !

Art. Poet. Chant. 3d.

He is in the right, and it is certainly that secret charm in the fabulous names of antiquity which animates the genius of the poet, and gives those glowing colours to his work which strikes so powerfully the imagination of his audience. This is one of the great advantages which the Greek tragedies have over many of ours.

* Racine's Andromache. Act III. Sc. 6.

But to return to Andromache. A Chorus of Theffalian women, moved to compassion by her deplorable state, come to share her grief. They are not in a condition to bring her any assistance, and this fruitless tenderness is more proper to heighten the tragic situation than to produce any change in it. All that these women can do is to pity the unhappy princess; and indeed, so far are they from undertaking to comfort her, that they declare plainly she has nothing to hope for, since a haughty and powerful rival has decreed her death. They therefore exhort her to call up all her courage and fortitude, and no longer to protract a miserable life in an asylum, which will soon cease to be any protection to her.

Hermione appears that moment. Vain of her pomp and riches, which she owes, she says, not to a husband, but a father, she thinks she has a right to speak with haughtiness and contempt to Andromache, whom she considers as a stranger, and a captive. She reproaches her with her wicked jealousy, "Which has induced thee," says Hermione, to make use of philtres to render me odious to Pyrrhus. Such arts are common to the women of Asia. But I will be revenged; there is no altar, or temple, or Goddess, that shall preserve thee from that death to which I have doomed thee. But should it happen that any God or any mortal should deliver thee from my hands; yet shall thy pride be mortified, and thou shall be forced to kneel and confess thyself my slave." Hermione goes farther yet: she tells her rival, that if she escapes death, she shall be condemned to the humiliating drudgery of sweeping and watering the palace. These are things which I can neither disguise nor translate. Hermione afterwards speaks with more dignity, but still in the language of rage and envy. She reminds Andromache that she is no longer in Troy, but in Greece, where it is shameful to see a man married to two women; a barbarous custom, which she accuses her rival of having first introduced among the Greeks. In Racine, the pride and fierceness of Hermione are expressed with more dignity; and indeed she speaks more like a French princess than an ancient heroine.

Andromache is at first doubtful, whether she shall answer to these invectives at the hazard of exposing herself to still worse usage; at length she gives way to a just indignation. "What support have I, says she to Hermione, that should encourage me to interrupt the happiness of your marriage? Can Troy, now laid in ashes, give terror to Sparta; and am I not a captive here? Can I presume upon that youth and beauty which I no longer possess? or can I draw

" draw any pretensions from the splendor of my country, now
 " ruined; or my illustrious kindred, now consigned to the tomb?"
 In Racine's tragedy, *Cleone* speaking of Andromache, uses the
 same arguments.

" Pensez-vous que des yeux toujours ouverts aux larmes
 " Se plaisent à troubler le repos de vos charmes;
 " Et qu'un cœur accablé de tant de déplaisirs
 " De son persécuteur ait brigué les soupirs?" Act. II. Sc. 1.

Here are the same thoughts, but ennobled by the expression. In Euripides, Hector's Widow continues thus: " Shall I be solicited for the sad privilege of bringing into the world slaves for Hermione; the wretched fruits of my captivity? If thou dost not give successors to the throne, thinkst thou my children will be suffered to reign? Can the Greeks ever forget that there was a Hector, and that I was his wife? If Pyrrhus repays thy passion with indifference, thyself only is to blame for it. Thy pride is the philtre of which thou complainest. Ah princess, it is virtue, and not beauty, which fixes the heart of a husband! Thou art displeased with Pyrrhus upon the slightest occasions, and then thou boastest the glory of thy Lacedemon, and contemnest Scyros. Thou talkest of thy superior riches, and preferrest Menelaus to Achilles. Alas! this is not the way to charm thy husband; haughtiness suits ill with a wife, although her husband was even blameable."

Andromache afterwards asks her, whether, if it had been her fate to be married to a prince of Thrace, where the sovereigns share their beds with several wives, she would have carried her rage and jealousy so far as to form designs upon their lives? She says several things upon this subject, which are neither suitable to our manners, nor consistent with the decency of our age; which requires, in words and in outward shew, a more scrupulous reserve than the severe virtue of the ancients did in what was essential. This is another proof of the impossibility of translating entirely the ancient tragedies. Andromache makes a merit of her kindness to Hector's mistresses; and (since it must be said) of having suckled children which he had by other women. It is not possible to carry farther our complaisance for the manners of antiquity. She concludes with reproaching Hermione with having had a mother outrageously jealous, and of following her example. " Thou art suspicious, says she, of the very air which thy husband breathes."

The

The Chorus here perform their office of mediators; and endeavour to prevail upon Hermione to consider well the arguments Andromache had urged in her own defence: but the haughty Lacedemonian princess is offended with the motion, and the conversation degenerates into a close sharp dialogue, which is managed with coarseness enough. At length Andromache declares that she will not quit her asylum; and Hermione retires, after threatening either to burn her in it, or to drag her thence by force. The Chorus conclude the act with some elegant complaints of the decision of Paris, which was the sole cause of the calamities of Andromache, of Troy, and of Greece.

A C T II.

In this act, Menelaus unfolds the design which Hermione had hinted at obscurely. He brings in Molossus, whose retreat he had discovered, and shews him to his mother, to force her by this base artifice to leave her sanctuary. A victim he is resolved to have, and either the mother or the son must die. Andromache, supported by some remains of haughtiness derived from her past grandeur, breaks into invectives against Menelaus, for thus abetting the barbarous designs of his jealous daughter. Is such a hero, she says, worthy of Troy? no, Troy deserved a nobler conqueror. What will he gain, she asks him, by sacrificing either the mother or the son? what but the hatred of Pyrrhus, and the contempt of the people. What treatment must Hermione expect to receive from Pyrrhus, if he should be weak enough to take her again, after committing so vile an action? Andromache concludes with offering to submit to any punishment, if she is guilty of those crimes of which her rival accuses her. "But if I am innocent, says she, ought a king like thee to enter into the passions of a woman, and adopt her fury?"

The Chorus think these expostulations too haughty in the mouth of a defenceless princess. Menelaus, enraged, justifies his conduct by political reasons, and keeps firm to the alternative he proposed to her at first; either she or her son must die. "What a miserable situation am I in, cries Andromache! I am undone if I deliberate, and whatever choice I make, it still is death. Why, thou barbarous author of my woes, why dost thou thirst after my life? Have I sought to destroy any of thy children? have I carried sword and fire into thy dominions? Unwillingly I became the object of Pyrrhus's love; why am I to be punished for it? Why

" dost thou not revenge it upon him? His is the guilt, not mine :
 " but it is because thou seest me helpless and unfriended that thou
 " takest up arms against me. Oh Troy! oh my dear country, to
 " what a fatal extremity am I reduced! must I be twice a mother
 " to be doubly wretched! But why do I deplore these misfe-
 " ries? have I not seen the loved remains of my Hector drag-
 " ged ignominiously in the dust? have I not beheld Ilion in flames,
 " and my Astyanax thrown from the walls of Pergamus! have I
 " not been forced, like a slave, on board the Grecian vessels? and
 " oh! to compleat my miseries, am I not become the wife of
 " Hector's murderer? Life has no longer any joys for me: my
 " past fortune, and my present state, render it odious. Yet still
 " one son remained, one dear tender hope, and this they would
 " tear from me: it is not my life they require, it is his: they fear
 " his vengeance, if he should escape their barbarous rage." She
 speaks differently in Racine, and doubtless with more propriety,
 with regard to Astyanax.

" Hélas, on ne craint point qu'il venge un jour son pere;
 " On craint qu'il n'essuyât les larmes d'une mere."

" Yet, pursues she, I should blush not to preserve him at the ex-
 " pense of my own life. It is done. I quit this altar. Behold
 " thy victim. Strike---Oh, my son! for thee I sacrifice myself: if,
 " in compassion, my enemies should spare thy life, remember thy
 " mother, and shouldest thou ever more behold thy father, tell him,
 " as thou bathest his face with thy tears, tell him the destiny of thy
 " mother, and to what excess she carried her tenderness for thee."
 In Racine, she nobly improves this thought; but it is not to her son
 that she speaks: such a discourse would there have been unseasonable.
 In such a situation, expression of tenderness, not lessons of gratitude,
 were proper. It is to her confidant that she addresses herself in
 this manner.

" Fais connoître à mon fils les Héros de sa race:
 " Autant que tu pourras conduis-le sur leur trace.
 " Dis-lui par quels exploits leurs noms ont éclaté.
 " Plutôt ce qu'ils ont fait que ce qu'ils ont été.
 " Parle-lui tous les jours des vertus de son pere,
 " Et quelquefois aussi parle-lui de sa mere.
 " Mais qu'il ne songe plus, Cephize, à nous venger;
 " Nous lui laissons un maître: il doit le ménager.

" Qu'il ait de ses ayeux un souvenir modeste ;
 " Il est du sang d'Hector ; mais il en est le reste,
 " Et pour ce reste enfin, j'ai moi-même en un jour
 " Sacrifié mon sang, ma haine, & mon amour."

If she had spoke to her son, she would have contented herself with saying, while she bathed his face with her tears,

" O Cendres d'un époux ! O Troyens, O mon Pere !
 " O mon Fils, que tes jours coûtent cher à ta mère."

The Chorus, in vain, endeavour to raise compassion in Menelaus and Hermione for the mother and son. Menelaus, no less base than cruel, is not ashamed to own his artifice, and to break his word. Being now the master of Andromache's fate, he promises nothing in favour of Molossus, and abandons him to the caprice of Hermione. Andromache, thus deceived, calls the Gods to witness to his perfidy. The Gods no longer assist her: reduced to despair, she loads the Lacedemonians with invectives and imprecations; and the gentlest epithet she gives them, is, that of treacherous. But in the time of this poet, did the Lacedemonians most deserve a reproach, which was common to all the Greeks? or rather, were they not at that time embroiled with the Athenians? If this had not been the case, would Euripides have attacked them with such keen strokes of satire; they on whom he had lavished so many praises? The reader may see what has been said upon this subject, in the first part of this work.

Menelaus causes the mother and the son to be conducted to the palace, to be afterwards led to death; and this interval is filled up by the Chorus, who attribute to plurality of wives those misfortunes which disturb the peace of families. They express the utmost abhorrence of the cruelty of Hermione and her father; and lament the fate of Andromache and Molossus.

The young prince and his mother appear again upon the stage; and probably in funeral habits, like Megara and her children in the *Hercules mad*. At least Andromache has her hands bound. Their complaints make a part of the interlude; and are those natural exclamations which approaching death put into the mouths of the ancients. The mother's lamentations are noble and pathetic; those of the child full of simplicity. Andromache presses her son close to her bosom, that they may not be separated in death; but tenderness at length prevails over pride, and she desires this beloved son to

fall at the feet of Menelaus, who is present. Menelaus continues unmoved as a rock, to which he compares himself.

A C T III.

The action being brought to this point, the arrival of Peleus, who is first perceived by the Chorus, produces a great revolution. Peleus, a venerable old man, full of a noble firmness, the husband of a Goddess, the father of Achilles, and the grandfather of Pyrrhus; and, by all these titles respectable to Menelaus, forces him at last to yield; but not without a sharp contest between them. This is one of those eager quarrels in which the Greek tragic writers were fond of displaying the whole art of the dialogue, to please a republican audience, who were naturally free, and great disputers. But, to say all, this is one of those scenes, which, notwithstanding this art, is incapable of pleasing us, because it shocks our manners, and is inconsistent with the rank and majesty of sovereign princes in our age: and indeed the two Greeks are no more sparing of their rude epithets to each other, than of arguments. This gives us a terrible prejudice against the ancients. The subject of their conversation is as follows:

Peleus, greatly surprised to see Andromache bound, and led to death, with her son, appears suddenly before their eyes, like a divinity who comes to deliver them from this imminent danger. The Trojan princess relates to him, in few words, the barbarous conduct of Hermione, and her motives for it. All this is natural and affecting; for Andromache, falling at the feet of Peleus, concludes her supplications with these words, so beautiful from their simplicity, “They have taken advantage of my husband’s absence, and of my helpless condition, to murder me and an infant who never wronged them. It is to implore thy compassion, oh prince! that I fall at thy feet; for alas! these fetters which thou beholdest, hinder me from embracing them.”

There is the same simplicity in the following lines of Virgil:

“Ecce trahebatur passis Priameia virgo
“Crinibus à templo Cassandra, adytisque Minervæ.
“Ad cœlum tendens ardentia lumina frustra,
“Lumina; nam teneras arcebant vincula palmas.”

“Oh prince, continues Andromache, save us, I conjure thee, in the name of the Gods! save a mother from a fate so horrid, the disgrace

" grace of which will reflect back on thee." Peleus immediately orders Andromache to be unbound. Menelaus haughtily forbids it. The former asks him by what right he takes upon him to act the sovereign in the dominions of another prince. Menelaus pleads the privilege of a kinsman, and a friend ; which, he says, renders the royal authority as well as good or bad fortune common to them both. From words full of resentment, they proceed to menaces. The king of Sparta declares that he will not release his victim ; and the king of Thessaly threatens to give him a stroke upon the head with his sceptre. We have already had an * instance of such a threat, which is in the true manner of Homer. At length Peleus makes a set speech, in which he reproaches his adversary with his weakness and pusillanimity, for suffering a base Phrygian to carry away his wife from his dominions, and for believing Helen prudent enough to be left to her own conduct. " For how should " Helen be chaste, says he, in a city, ('tis Sparta he means) where " custom allows young virgins to enter tournaments, habited like " Amazons?" + The original here describes the Lacedemonians exactly as Virgil has done in the first book of the Eneid, ver. 314. where he represents Venus appearing to her son Eneas, in the forest at Carthage.

" Virginis os habitumque ferens & virginis arma:
 " Spartanæ : vel qualis equos Threïssa fatigat
 " Harpalycē, volucremque fugâ prævertitur Hebrum.
 " Namque humeris de more habilem suspenderat arcum
 " Venatrix, dederatque comam diffundere ventis,
 " Nuda genu, nodoque sinus collecta fluentes."

And in verse 336.

" Virginibus Tyriis mos est gestare pharetram
 " Purpureoque altè suras vincire cothurno."

This was the dress of the Lacedemonian virgins, who, by a law of Lycurgus, were taught the most robust bodily exercises. But the other cities of Greece did not approve of a custom so little suited to the modesty of the sex ; and it is this indecency with which

* It is in the Iphigenia in Aulis. Menelaus threatens a slave with the same treatment.

+ I have thus expressed the games of the race, and by the term *Amazonian habit*, the dress, in which they were performed.

Peleus reproaches Menelaus. He afterwards draws a very disadvantageous picture of Helen, but conformable enough to the truth. All the miseries she was the cause of to the Greeks and Trojans; the loss of so many heroes; the tears of so many mothers; even the death of Achilles; and many other calamities, he attributes to Menelaus alone; to a husband who was base enough to purchase back, at so high a price, a fury * whom he ought to have left to the Trojans with execrations; nay, to have rewarded the ravishers for keeping her in their hands. These are nearly the terms which Peleus makes use of.

Nor is the old monarch more tender of the honour of Menelaus, in point of courage: he represents him as a hero but in name, who alone of all the princes returned without a wound; and who was so far from staining his armour with blood, that he kept it carefully concealed, and brought no other weapons from Troy than those he had carried thither. Very different, says he, from the Grecian heroes, who inherited the armour of their vanquished foes; or who, through esteem for each other's valour, mutually exchanged it, as Ajax and Hector did †. He adds, that it was contrary to his inclination that Pyrrhus contracted an alliance with Menelaus. He places before his eyes the sacrifice of Iphigenia, an inhuman deed which he forced Agamemnon to commit; and without a blush could insist upon a brother's sacrificing his own daughter, to recover an unfaithful wife. He charges it upon him as a crime, his not having killed this infamous wife, when he got her again into his power; and his suffering himself to be won by her false caresses: and lastly, he fills him with shame and confusion, on account of the base action he now surprised him in: he insists upon his taking back Hermione, and delivering Thessaly from such a fury, and threatens him with a revenger in the person of Molossus, the son of Andromache.

After a reflection of the Chorus, who think Peleus too severe in his resentment, Menelaus answers, and pays invective with invective. He tells Peleus, that he shews but little wisdom to quarrel thus with an ally for the sake of a foreigner, whom he ought to have banished beyond the Phasis, as being descended from the enemies of Greece, and, in part, the cause of Achilles' death. How shameful, he says, for the father of that hero to receive the widow of Hector into his dominions, and suffer her to give him grandsons; a disgrace which Menelaus, like a

* See the same expressions in the Iphigenia in Aulis, Act II. Scene 2. Vol. I.

† See the Ajax of Sophocles, Vol. II.

true friend, would have washed away in the blood of Andromache and Molossus. For, should Hermione, continues he, be so unfortunate as to have no issue, wouldst thou put the scepter into the hands of a Trojan slave? If thou hadst a daughter so contemptuously treated as Hermione has been, wouldst thou not espouse her interests? He afterwards justifies himself, but slightly, on the article of his courage; a point which a Frenchman would have settled without so much argument. As for Helen, Menelaus attributes all her misfortunes to the Gods? and thus, with a single stroke, erases all that calumny can alledge against her: he even asserts, that the siege of Troy was very advantageous to the Greeks, by producing them so many heroes. He applauds himself for not making any attempt upon the life of Helen, and wishes that Peleus had spared * that of Phocus, his brother. This is reproach for reproach. These severe truths on both sides are softened by the Chorus, who, on this occasion perform their peculiar office, which, as Horace says, is to mediate between enemies. But this does not hinder Peleus from answering: he still dwells upon the expedition against Troy, from which Menelaus arrogated so much glory to himself. "It is unjust, says "Peleus, to give to the general that honour which the soldiers pur- "chased at the price of their blood." These lines of Euripides, which, with equal malignity and imprudence, were repeated by Clytus, in order to debase Alexander, cost that favourite his life.

Peleus, while he is speaking, approaches Andromache, raises her from the ground, orders his grandson to unbind her, and assists him himself; expressing at the same time, his indignation against Menelaus, for his cruelty towards a princess, whose only crime it was to be a mother, while Hermione was childless. He speaks to him with the authority of a sovereign; commands the father and the daughter to return to Sparta; he assures them of a powerful enemy in Molossus, and declares himself more desirous of their destruction than ever Paris was.

Menelaus, with an affected moderation, takes a resolution to leave Phthia: a war, he says, recalls him to his own dominions, and leaves him no leisure to terminate this petty quarrel: but he de-

* Pausan. *in Corinthe*. Telamon and Peleus having invited Phocus, their brother, to the five games in use among the Greeks, Peleus struck Phocus with a stone, which served him instead of a quoit; which, Pau-

fanius adds, shewed that the crime was doubtful; or, at least, it passed for such; therefore it was malicious in Menelaus to reproach him with it.

clares, that if they do not do justice to Hermione, he will return and take vengeance on them. As for the reproaches Peleus casts upon him, he disdains to make any reply to them, and retires. Andromache pays her acknowledgments to her deliverer; but, like a fearful dove just escaped from the talons of a vulture, she still trembles, lest Menelaus should forceably carry away her and her son to Sparta. Peleus removes her fears, in a manner not very honourable for Menelaus; for he depends less upon his own forces than the cowardice of his enemy; and, to set Andromache's mind entirely at ease, he conducts her back to the palace. The Chorus, in the interlude, envy the good fortune of the great, who have it in their power, by their alliances, mutually to assist each other in the most pressing dangers. They also praise the courage and resolution of Peleus.

A C T IV.

Hermione's confidant enters in great terror, to inform the Chorus that her mistress, distracted with remorse, and wholly delivered up to her despair, through the apprehensions of the displeasure of Pyrrhus, has made an attempt upon her own life; and that it is with great difficulty her attendants can defend her against herself. Accordingly a noise is heard in the palace, occasioned by their forcing from her a poniard, with which she was going to stab herself; and immediately afterwards she appears upon the stage: she tears her hair and her robes, and sends forth cries which shew her repentance, and the excess of her fear.

The Chorus, and her confidant, in vain endeavour to calm her mind and remove her apprehensions. She seeks the poniard, which had been forced out of her hands: she thinks of nothing but of throwing herself into the flames, or from the top of some rock. Sometimes she represents to herself her miserable situation, abandoned by a father, delivered up, as she supposes, to the vengeance of Andromache, and constrained to humble herself to the stranger. This has been happily imitated by Racine.

“Est-ce-là, dira t'il, cette fiere Hermione?
“Elle me dédaignoit: une autre l'abandonne.
“L'ingrate qui mettoit son cœur à si haut prix
“Apprend donc à son tour à souffrir des mépris.
“Ah, Dieux !”

However, it must be owned, although Racine says he is obliged to Euripides for the character of Hermione, that he has ennobled that

that character greatly, by the beautiful turn he has given his piece; and, once more I repeat it, there can be no comparison made between the two Andromaches in a situation so very different.

" Princess, resumes the confidant, I cannot allow thy fears any more than thy attempt upon the life of thy Trojan rival, to be just: " It is not probable, that Pyrrhus, although he should be moved with the tears of this foreigner, will carry his resentment so far as thou imaginest. No, no, he does not consider thee as a captive taken from the ashes of Troy; thou art the daughter of a great king, born in a powerful state; thou broughtest him large treasures, and thy alliance is advantageous to him. Do not suppose that thy father has abandoned thee; or that he will suffer thee to be treated unworthily by Pyrrhus: resume thy wonted fortitude, and return to thy apartment. Avoid the shame of appearing publicly in the condition thou art now."

Hereupon the Chorus perceive a stranger approaching, who enquires for the palace of Pyrrhus, and calls himself Orestes, the son of Agamemnon. This prince is in love with Hermione; and, under pretence of taking a journey to Delphos, to consult the oracle, he comes to Phthia to steal away his mistress, during the absence of Pyrrhus. Hermione rejoices at the sight of Orestes, and resolves to take advantage of his love for her, to shield her from the vengeance of her husband. She throws herself at the feet of Agamemnon's son, and gives an artful turn to her conduct towards Andromache, and the occasion of her own fears. For without attempting to justify herself, she casts all the odium of her barbarous design upon the advice given her by some women, whom, with great simplicity, she describes as cruel Syrens, who, by their venomous speeches, infused the poison of revenge into her heart. " Need I say more, adds she; the pleasing hope of revenge, the absence of Pyrrhus, my father's countenance and support, my wealth, and the rank I held as queen, all smoothed the way to guilt, and prompted me to be revenged upon my rival." Here she makes some reflections, not very honourable for her sex. " A prudent husband, says she, ought not to allow his wife to receive the visits even of women; by them she is sure to have fatal lessons given her, some through interest, some through passion, and others that they may have companions in their crimes." Hermione is for having young wives secured with walls and gates, against the approach of these Syrens. What would Moliere have said of such an expedient? The Chorus, which is composed of women, are piqued at

these invectives, and pardon them only in consideration of her excessive grief.

Orestes, transported to find matters brought to the very point he wished, confesses to Hermione, that she was the sole cause of his journey, and he takes advantage of her situation to declare himself: but he sets a price upon the assistance he promises her. If Hermione would be free, and would quit with safety the dominions of Pyrrhus, she must marry Orestes: to him she had first been promised by Menelaus; but he afterwards bestowed her, as a recompence upon a warrior who had fought against Troy. In vain did the son of Agamemnon implore the son of Achilles not to interrupt his happiness, and deprive him of her he loved: the Thessalian prince answered him only with invectives. He reproached Orestes with being delivered over to the Furies, after the impious murder of his mother; an affront which the unhappy lover could not pardon; and which his passion for Hermione engraved still deeper in his heart. Such is the subject of Orestes's discourse, which discovers much less art than the conduct Racine makes him observe.

Hermione refers her lover to Menelaus, as to what concerns his proposal of marriage; which is, in effect, to yield: but she readily accepts his other conditions, and consents to go with him, through her apprehensions of the fate she foresees. "For the future, says Orestes, fear neither Peleus nor Pyrrhus." As for the latter, the son of Agamemnon declares he will go to Delphos in search of him, and wash away the affront she has received in the blood of that insolent rival: a barbarous resolution, to which Hermione consents by her silence. We see plainly that the French Hermione manages her scheme very differently. It is she, rather than Orestes, who kills Pyrrhus, and kills him in spite of herself, by the hand of a disdained lover, from whom she requires his life, after having forced him to commit that inhuman action. In Euripides, Orestes and Hermione leave Phthia immediately, and go to Delphos, whether Pyrrhus was gone before, to demand a reason of Phœbus for the murder of Achilles. An impiety which makes the unravelling of this piece.

A C T V.

Peleus discovers that Hermione is fled with Orestes, and learns from the Chorus all the circumstances of the conspiracy against Pyrrhus. Just as he is going to send a messenger to his son, to inform him of what had happened, he sees a courier enter, who comes to

to give him an account of those misfortunes which he fears. This incident is wholly improbable, since Orestes, instead of having time to do all that the messenger relates, could not even have reached Delphos. And this, I think, is the first instance of Euripides forgetting himself in this point : he who, as well as his cotemporary poets, was so remarkably exact in preserving the unities of time and place.

The courier, after overwhelming Peleus with grief, by suddenly telling him that Pyrrhus is slain by the Delphians and Orestes, relates this action circumstantially; which, without observing that the journey to Delphos required some hours at least, is too repugnant to our manners to bear a literal translation ; however, the substance of his account is as follows : " Pyrrhus had been three days at Delphos when the people suspected that he came to take a view of the temple, in order to carry off the treasures that were in it. This suspicion was founded upon the complaints Pyrrhus was heard to make of Apollo, whom he considered as the murderer of Achilles. ... The senate assembled, and caused guards to be planted secretly about the temple. Mean time Pyrrhus began a sacrifice; the design of which, he said, was to expiate the fault he had been guilty of in demanding a reason of Apollo for the death of his father, as if the God had been his assassin. Orestes slipped unobserved into the temple, and, by artful insinuations, changed the people's suspicions of the ill designs of Pyrrhus into a certainty. That instant, the Delphians, who were in arms, besieged Pyrrhus on all sides, and fell upon him sword in hand. He avoided the strokes they aimed at him, and seizing his armour, which hung upon one of the pillars, he advanced towards the altar, and made head against that croud of assailants."

Here the messenger enlarges upon the more than human valour exerted by his hero. Pyrrhus, although wounded, wards off with his buckler, a shower of stones and arrows ; but he is hard pressed: for they attacked him even with spits. This, for example, is what a Frenchman cannot translate, any more than the messenger's account of Pyrrhus's activity, in leaping to a prodigious height to avoid their strokes : we have reason for wishing that he had told us in two words, as Racin does, that

" Chacun se disputoit la gloire de l'abbattre,

" Je l'ai vu dans leurs mains quelque tems se débattre,

‘ Tout sanglant à leurs coups vouloir se dérober :
 “ Mais enfin à l'autel il est allé tomber *.”

Euripides, not satisfied with giving his hero the glory of an obstinate defence, adds to it that of a vigorous attack. Pyrrhus throws himself into the midst of the Delphians, and obliges them to fly before him, like fearful doves at the sight of the vulture. A great number fall by his repeated strokes; when all on a sudden a divine voice is heard in the temple, which inspires new courage into the Delphians. One of them first renewes the fight, the rest second him, all are eager for a share in the glory of wounding Pyrrhus; and, even after his death, they pierce him with a thousand wounds. The messenger concludes his narration, and the body of Pyrrhus is brought upon the stage. Thus this whole action is performed in the twinkling of an eye.

This melancholy sight compleats the despair of Peleus: he throws himself upon the body of his grandson; he bathes it with his tears; and, by a new emotion of grief, he wishes that he had been buried under the ruins of Troy. At length he expresses his affliction in those moving and natural terms for which the Greek tragedians were so famous. The Chorus increase the tragic impression; and the whole stage thus agitated, represents a king and his people in tears. This was the usual manner of inquiring for the dead among the Greeks.

This funeral ceremony is interrupted by the sudden appearance of a Goddess, who, traversing the skies, descends upon the stage, and makes herself known for Thetis, the wife of Peleus. She consoles this prince by her own example, who, though a Goddess, was obliged to suffer the loss of Achilles, her son, and to yield to fate: she bids Peleus therefore to suspend his grief, that he may go to Delphos and bury Pyrrhus, in order to revenge his death upon the inhabitants by so distinguished an honour, and to leave to posterity a monument of the cruelty of Orestes. She ordains that Andromache shall go to the Molossians to espouse Helenus, by that means to make way for Molossus, the only remaining branch of the Æacides, to give lawful heirs to the throne of Molossia; so that the race of Achilles and Hector, united in Andromache and Pyrrhus, may be perpetuated in a powerful kingdom.

* Andromathe, Act V. Scene 3.

As for Peleus, his good fortune, in having been the husband of a Goddess, raises him to a divinity. Thetis orders him to retire into a grotto of the Fortunate islands, where he shall behold again Achilles deified. She afterwards comes, attended by fifty Nereids, to transport him into the palace of Nereus, where, as her spouse, she gives him the quality of a Demi-God.

As the moral of this piece turns upon the happiness of equal marriages, and the dangerous consequences of polygamy, it may be said that it is the punishment of Pyrrhus, as well as the settlement of Andromache among the Molossians.

T H E

THE
S U P P L I A N T S.

A

T R A G E D Y by E U R I P I D E S.

ALTHOUGH the title of this tragedy is the same with one written by Eschylus, yet the subject of it is very different. The Suppliants of Eschylus is founded upon the history of the Danaides, as we have already seen; but the Suppliants of Euripides recalls to our remembrance the history of the Seven Chiefs, at the siege of Thebes; at least it is a very natural continuation of it. In other respects, this piece of Euripides has a great resemblance to that which bears the same title, and is composed by Eschylus.

The Argives, whom Polynices had led against Thebes, had been vanquished, and obliged to raise the siege. Creon, by the deaths of the two brothers, was raised to the throne of Thebes, and caused the bodies of the Argives who were killed at the siege, to be cast out, forbidding his subjects to give them burial; which, among the Pagans, was a punishment worse than death itself. Adrastus, king of Argos, enraged at this affront, but too weak to revenge it, went to Eleusis, a town in Attica, followed by the mothers and widows of those warriors who fell before the walls of Thebes, to implore Theseus to take up arms against Creon in their behalf, and to bury the illustrious dead in his country, since they were denied sepulchral rites in Thebes. This is what Euripides calls the Suppliants. The women who accompany Adrastus compose the Chorus. The persons of the drama are, Adrastus, Theseus, Æthra, the mother of Theseus; Evadne, the wife of Capaneus, one of the seven captains who was killed at the siege; Iphis, his father; two heralds; a child; and lastly, the Goddess Minerva. The scene is laid in a temple dedicated to Ceres, in Eleusis, a country of Greece; where, ac-

cording to the fable, this Goddess first introduced the custom of sowing corn. This piece was acted under the archon Antiphon, in the third year of the ninetieth olympiad; at a time when a league was concluded between the Argives and the Lacedemonians, after the latter had gained a great victory over the former.

ACT I.

The opening of this scene must needs have been very striking and magnificent. Æthra is represented kneeling before an altar, with her offering in her hand, and surrounded by the priests. The temple is full of women, who bear olive branches wreathed with linen, and in the vestibula of the temple king Adrastus appears with his head veiled; near him are the children of these Argive ladies, all in the posture of suppliants. Æthra addresses herself to Ceres, and to the ministers of her altars: she offers up prayers for herself, for Theseus, for Athens, and for Trœzen, her native country: she implores the Gods to remove all misfortunes from them: she acknowledges that her prayers are now animated by apprehensions for herself at the sight of those illustrious mourners, who have so lately fallen at her feet and implored her assistance. Such is the usual effect of our compassion for others, and these are strokes of nature which never escape the ancient poets. In the course of her prayers she makes known the cause of the suppliants affliction, and the design of their coming: she paints, in a few words, all that I have said in explaining the subject; and it is on this beautiful scene that Statius has founded the twelfth book of his Thebaid. The delicate art with which Euripides has managed this first scene, renders it more interesting than most of the other prologues of this author.

Æthra returns to the principal design of this sacrifice. It is for the fruits of the earth that she supplicates ceres, to whom she makes an offering of Corn. In this ceremony she thinks herself obliged; in humanity to these strangers, to wait the coming of Theseus, to whom, she says, she has sent, intreating him to espouse their interests.

Here the Chorus of women advance, and redouble their intreaties, with many marks of the extremest affliction. It is their husbands and sons whom they lament, and whose ashes are cruelly denied them. “ Oh queen, say they, thou art thyself a mother! “ from thee we expect a tender sympathy in our woes: restore to “ us, by the aid of Theseus, all that we hold most dear. It is not
“ the

" the Goddess whom we come to supplicate, it is thee only. Thou
 " art able to soften our distress; thou art the mother of a
 " happy monarch, and hast it in thy power to relieve us. Alas!
 " the only favour we implore, is the sad remains of our sons, that
 " we may embrace them, and bathe them with our tears."

They afterwards sing one of those little odes which are often introduced amidst the scenes of the Greek tragedies, under the titles of Strophes and Antistrophes; striking their breasts, after the Grecian manner of mourning; which, say they, is natural to mothers, and will never end but with their lives.

In the midst of this general sorrow Theseus arrives, who, not seeing them yet, and hearing funeral cries, trembles for his mother. At length he approaches, and turning his eyes towards the altar, he beholds Æthra surrounded by this croud of mourners, who appear to him to be strangers, and whose air and habits, so little suitable to the pomp of the sacrifice, still more increase his anxious curiosity. Æthra, in two words, declares who these suppliants are; she is interrupted by their sighs and tears, which proves that shew and action made one of the chief parts of the ancient tragedies. Adrastus explains himself; after a short and spirited dialogue, he tells him, that in obedience to an oracle of Apollo, doubtless but ill understood, and which we have already taken notice of in the *Pheonicians*, he had given his daughters in marriage to Polynices and Tydeus; an alliance which engaged him in the fatal war of Thebes, which he undertook contrary to the will of the Gods, and in compliance with the advice of rash and booring youth, who breathed nothing but vengeance: " A too common temerity, says he, which has ruined so many kings! I, pursues he, grown grey under a diadem, and once happy, ought to blush thus to embrace thy knees; but judge of my misfortunes by this humiliation; restore to me the bodies of my loved friends; have compassion on my distress, and the affliction of so many wretched mothers. Reflect, that they have undertaken this painful journey, not to supplicate the Goddess, but Theseus: their only prayer is to be allowed to pay their sons those duties which they wished to have received from them; and oh! reflect, that to look with a benevolent eye upon affliction well becomes the happy."

This last sentiment is carried too far for us, who are fond of precision, and dislike long moral speeches. For Adrastus, I know not how, introduces a thought which has since become a favourite with all

the poets; namely, that poetry requires a calm and serene mind: and as Despreaux says,

“ Un Auteur qui pressé d'un besoin importun
 “ Le soir entend crier ses entrailles à jeun,
 “ Goûte peu d'Helicon les douces promenades.
 “ Horace a bû son saoul, quand il voit les Ménades,
 “ Et libre du souci qui trouble Colletet,
 “ N'attend pas pour dîner le succès d'un Sonnet *.

Adraustus continues, and prevents the objection that might be made to his request: that, as king of Argos, his own dominions will afford him a resource in this misfortune. He confesses that they cannot, and that Athens is the only city, and Theseus the only prince, who is able to take vengeance on the Thebans for the affront the Argives had sustained. This is introduced to please the Athenians.

Theseus begins his answer with an eulogium on the providence of the Gods: he then inveighs against the pride of mortals, who presume to find fault with their works: he applies this piece of morality, which is a little tedious, to Adraustus, whom he blames for having failed in his respect to the oracles of the Gods, and imprudently married his daughters to two strangers who were polluted with crimes. The alliance, says he, which the good contract with the wicked, confounds them in their punishment. He tells Adraustus, that his neglect of the oracles, and his blind confidence in two young men which engaged him in a rash war, are the sources of all his misfortunes. Theseus here draws the character of those turbulent spirits who are dangerous to a state, “ They eagerly seek after honours, says he, at the price of an unjust war, and make use of all their arts to corrupt their fellow-citizens; some, that they may obtain military employments, or to be in a condition to revenge their private quarrels; others, that they may enrich themselves; and all cry out for war, without considering the irreparable injury they do to the people. For there are three sorts of citizens in a state: the wealthy, who are incapable of serving it, and bend all their thoughts to accumulating riches upon riches: the indigent, who, full of envy, and bearing a secret hatred against the rich, asperse them with malignant slanders at the instigation of their wicked leaders, who govern them as they please: the third sort, which

* Despr. Art. Poet. chant. 4. v. 18.

" is by far the best, are the support and preservation of the state.
" It is they who maintain the observation of good laws." These are so many lessons for the Athenians; and if Euripides had had cotemporary commentators, like Despreaux, we should doubtless have known the design of several anecdotes hinted at in this passage, and throughout this whole piece, which is an allegory upon the political interests of Greece.

The Argives were beaten by the Lacedemonians this year, which was the fourteenth of the Peloponnesian war. The Athenians, it is highly probable, would not have been sorry to have gained the Argives; and here without doubt lies the secret policy of this tragedy, the design of which is to dissuade the Athenians from making any treaty with the Lacedemonians, their enemies.

Theseus, after having delivered himself thus with great gravity, declares that it would be unjust to assist those who have been guilty of so much imprudence and temerity, " Therefore, adds he, how
" can I venture to succour thee? what shall I say to my people?
" what reasonable motive shall I assign for granting thee the aid
" thou requirest? Thy enterprize has been too ill concerted to suffer
" us to engage in it under the same auspices."

ADRASTUS. I did not come to thee as to my judge, but as to my physician, to relieve me from my distemper: if I have acted wrong. I expect not to find in thee a revenger who will doom me to punishment; but a friend by whom I may be assisted. If thou deniest my just request, I must acquiesce in thy will: for how, indeed, can I help myself? Come then, ye unfortunate mothers, let us return; but first cast on the ground these useless branches, and call the Gods, the Earth, Ceres, and the Sun to witness, that your supplications have been rejected by a prince with whom by blood you are united*. Thou art resolved then, oh Theseus! thus to dismiss these matrons, whose age and affliction ought to have rendered them respectable to thee---Yet sure it cannot be: caves serve for asylums to beasts, the altars of the Gods for slaves; and flourishing kingdoms to distressed states, well knowing that here below no felicity is lasting.

The Chorus of matrons throw themselves at the feet of Theseus; redoubling their cries and prayers: Theseus is moved; but Ethra, pierced with compassion, veils her face. The king of Athens is

* Ethra, the mother of Theseus, was the daughter of Pytheus, and consequently allied to the Argives.

greatly affected with the tears of his mother. After some modest precautions, for the Grecian women were extremely delicate, with respect to the decorum observed by their sex, she breaks silence : she reminds her son of the respect due to the Gods, and sacred asylums; the glory he would acquire by succouring the distressed, and the bad consequence that might attend his disgracing Athens, and even himself, by a refusal.

The king, at length, acknowledges that his honour is concerned to follow the advice his mother gives him: Shall he who is the revenger of violated justice, and a dreadful scourge to the wicked, meanly lose an opportunity of signalizing his equity and his courage? He promises therefore to take up arms against Thebes; but he will first have his people's consent to this expedition, to give it a farther sanction; for he declares, that he governs like a father a free city; and that he always gives his citizens the right of suffrage on such occasions: This is an artful turn in the poet, to interest the Athenian people still more in favour of Theseus. The Chorus conclude this act with expressions of gratitude and joy, and with praises of the Athenians and their king.

A C T II.

Theseus enters, attended by a herald at arms, to whom he speaks as follows : " Go to the king of Thebes, and bear him this message from me : Theseus intreats thee to restore the Argives their dead, and on this condition offers thee the friendship of the Athenians. If Creon consents to this request, return instantly ; if he refuses, tell him that I will come at the head of an army to the well of Callirhoe, to demand the dead." This was a place at a small distance from Eleusis, so called on account of the sacred dances which were performed there by the women in honour of Ceres.

While the king of Athens is giving orders to his ambassador, one from Creon arrives, upon which Theseus detains his. The Theban deputy enquires for the monarch of Athens, and Theseus makes himself known to him, reproving him at the same time for the title he gives him. Athens, he tells him, is a free city, where all the citizens, as well poor as rich, have a right to give their votes in affairs of state ; and that he is contented with being the chief, and the sovereign of his people. This declaration gives rise to a singular dispute between this prince and the deputy; one defends a republican, the other a monarchical state. The deputy begins, and insists upon the wrong method of chusing republican magi-

strates, which he compares to a cast of the dice; upon the abuse of eloquence, which turns the minds of the citizens at pleasure, and which makes black pass for white among them; upon the ignorance of the multitude; and lastly, upon the artifice of wicked men, in raising themselves to the chief employments.

The Theban deputy extols the government of Thebes, by shewing what it is not, to fall with a counter-stroke upon that of Athens; but as it would not have been safe for Euripides to have made the objection very strong, these hints are not sufficiently marked, and are thrown out at random. However, Theseus thinks the deputy argues speciously, and therefore that he is under a necessity of refuting him. He declares, that nothing appears to him more pernicious than a monarchical state; that under a sovereign the laws are silent; whereas, in a republic, they speak equally for the poor and the rich: that among them there is no other arbitrator but justice; that each citizen may give his opinion and advice for the public good; and whoever has merit, may force it into notice. But, in a kingly government, men of wisdom and virtue are suspected, and are often rewarded with death for their equity and love for their country. "Of what use, continues he, full of his republican enthusiasm, is it to any one to amass riches for his children, when a tyrant robs them of the greater part; or to educate his daughters with care, who will fall a prey to his loose desires, and become a source of affliction to their parents? May heaven inflict its severest punishments upon me, whenever I force any citizen to marry a daughter of mine."

Such is the answer of Theseus. He afterwards asks the ambassador on what occasion he is sent to him, telling him at the same time, with much dignity, that if he did not respect in his person the quality of an ambassador, and the law of nations, he would make him repent the freedom of his language.

The Theban acquires himself of his commission with extreme haughtiness: he forbids Theseus, in his master's name, to receive Adrastus; or if he is already arrived, he insists upon the king of Athens dismissing him before sun-set. He tells him that the Athenians were to blame to trouble themselves about the burial of the dead Argives; and threatens him with war if he does not obey Creon, in driving Adrastus out of his dominions. The ambassador, to give greater weight to his words, exaggerates the miseries of war, and the temerity of republics, who are not sufficiently sensible of its consequences, because

each citizen, who gives his vote for taking up arms, thinks himself secure from danger ; but they would be more cautious if each, in giving his vote, had the horrors of death before his eyes. He even colours with an appearance of justice the conduct of Creon, with regard to the Argives. It would seem, he says, as if heaven had condemned them, since Capaneus was struck dead with lightning. Shall Athens then, pursues he, pretend to oppose the Gods, and surpass them in wisdom ? Ought her foolish pity to be carried so far as to protect the wicked ?

At this speech Adrastus is no longer able to restrain his indignation : he speaks to the ambassador in very harsh terms; but Theseus obliges him to be silent. “ It is to me, and not to thee that he “ is sent.” He then answers the ambassador himself; but in so noble a manner, that his speech has a great advantage over that of the Theban, and makes this scene extremely interesting. “ I do not, “ says he, acknowledge a master in Creon ; then by what right “ does he presume to prescribe laws to Athens ? It is not Athens “ who begins the war, but engages in it to maintain a law sacred a-“ mong the Greeks, that of giving the rites of sepulchre to the “ dead. The Thebans ought to be satisfied with having revenged “ themselves by taking away the lives of their enemies, without “ carrying their cruelty beyond death. As spirits return to their “ first principle, bodies are due to the earth, their mother. It is “ not Argos only, but all Greece that is offended with the barbarity “ of Creon ; this pernicious example is enough to stifle the war-“ riors ardour. What ! dare you boast your courage, and info-“ lently threaten us, yet suffer yourselves to be terrified by the dead ? “ Are you afraid, that if the Argives are buried, they will pierce “ through the bowels of the earth to take arms once more against “ you ? or that, from their ashes, revengers will arise to punish your “ impiety ? Rather reflect that fortune sports with weak mortals ; “ and that those who are happy one day, may be miserable the “ next. The greatest among us ought always to distrust the stability “ of his good fortune, and not seek to oppress an humbled foe ; espe-“ cially by violating the sacred laws of humanity. Restore us the dead, “ then, and speedily ; otherwise I will force them from you at the “ head of an army : it shall never be said that Theseus suffered the “ laws of the Gods to be trampled upon with impunity.”

This speech of the Athenian king is supported with the acclama-
tions of the Chorus. A new contest afterwards arises between Theseus and the deputy, but short, and in the true taste of the drama.

The

The Theban declares that they will keep the dead, and the king that he will force Creon to restore them. The ambassador represents to the king the danger of a doubtful war. "I have hazarded many other dangers," replies Theseus. And when the other asks him, whether he thought himself able to cope with the whole universe? "Yes, answers Theseus, with all the wicked." At length the king imposes silence on the deputy by these words: "Be gone: all thy insolence shall not gain thee the advantage of raising my anger. The business now is not to talk, but act. I will go myself to give Creon notice of my arrival. Depart." Theseus insists upon Adrastus remaining at Eleusis, and reserves to himself alone the honour of the victory: besides, he is apprehensive of associating himself in the misfortunes which seem to attend Adrastus: he then implores the assistance of the Gods, the protectors of justice, and retires to prepare himself for the battle.

Æthra forms an interlude of regular stanzas with the Chorus. This consists in the mutual communication of their hopes and fears. They are alarmed at the tumult of arms, but the courage and good fortune of Theseus re-assures them. At length this numerous train of matrons unite their prayers and supplications for the success of the Athenian army.

A C T III.

Their prayers are granted at the beginning of the third act. This event is very sudden, and has somewhat the air of a miracle. We shall find, by the recital of what passed, that the scheme and the execution of it follow too near: this is the same kind of fault as in the tragedy of Andromache.

A man comes from Thebes, and at the first word acquaints the queen and the Chorus that Theseus has gained the victory. He calls himself an officer of Capaneus, who was killed at the siege of Thebes. He tells them, that the Athenian army having freed him from captivity, ordered him to haste before with news so interesting to the Argive ladies. The Chorus, if we may trust the editions and manuscripts, keep up the conversation with the messenger, while Adrastus scarce speaks at all. Milton has corrected this in a manner probable enough: he attributes several questions to king Adrastus, who doubtless is more than any other interested in this event; but it is no less surprizing to find that Æthra does not appear in this act, and yet it is certain she was upon the stage in the preceding one, and there is no probable reason for supposing that she is retired.

tired. This is a fault which I cannot venture to justify any more than the former. The third act is very short, and would in one of our tragedies make only a single scene, since it is nothing more than the narration of a battle; which can only please from the beauty of the verses and some images, together with the interest which the spectator must take in this change of fortune for the Suppliants.

The Chorus ask the messenger some questions concerning the present condition of the Athenian army: he tells them that they are safe, and at the height of their wishes. He afterwards gives them a circumstantial account of the action. "I was upon the walls of Thebes, says he, and saw the Athenians advance in good order upon the banks of the river Ismenus; the army was divided into three columns. The Thebans drew up before their walls in order of battle, having behind them the dead bodies of the Argives, for which they contested. They opposed horse to horse, and chariot to chariot. Then Theseus's herald at arms raised his voice, and declared, that the Athenians came to demand the dead, not to revenge them. No answer being returned on Creon's side, this silence was understood as a refusal. The two armies began to move at the same time, the chariots mingling, overturned, and broke." Here the officer gives a noble description of the battle; the clouds of dust that obscured the sun; the clashing of their arms, and the rivers of blood that flowed on all sides. "The action, says he, becoming general, Creon animated his soldiers by his presence; nor did Theseus forget himself in so delicate a conjuncture. He advanced, he fought like a lion; but while posted in his right wing, he put the left wing of his enemies to flight, his left wing gave way to the enemies right. The victory was doubtful; but Theseus, like a consummate general, instead of stopping to plunder, led back his soldiers to the assistance of his left wing. He sent forth a shout that was heard on all sides: My companions, says he, the glory of Athens is lost, if we do not complete our victory. He then armed himself with a club * of an enormous bigness, and overthrew all who ventured to oppose him; his dreadful blows carried death wherever they fell: at length, though with much difficulty, he put this dreadful battalion to flight. Having now gained an entire victory, terror and amaze-

* The poet calls it the Epidaurian club, because, according to Plutarch, Theseus took it from Periphetes, whom he killed in

Epidaurus, and afterwards made use of it, as Hercules did of the skin of the Nemean Lyon.

"ment.

" ment seized the whole city. The people had already taken re-
 " fuge in their temples. Nothing hindred Theseus from entering
 " Thebes as a conqueror; but satisfied with having defeated the
 " Thebans, he restrained his army. It was, says he, to recover the
 " bodies of the dead Argives, and not to destroy Thebes, that we
 " took up arms. What a king is this! exclaims the officer, trans-
 " ported with admiration; what a general! how intrepid in danger!
 " He knows how to humble the insolence of his enemies: he knows
 " how to conquer; and, what raises him to the highest pitch of ho-
 " nour, he knows how to moderate his ambition in the midst of
 " victories, and generously suffers the prey which had fallen into his
 " hands to escape."

The Argive ladies acknowledge the justice of the Gods in this happy success. Adraustus, who till now had suffered the women to speak, whose joy is more extravagant, and their curiosity greater, (for we can assign no other reason for his silence, if we do not admit Milton's corrections) begins, although rather too late, to speak in his turn, and in his transport cries out, " Oh Jupiter! how nar-
 " row and confined is the understanding of mortals! and how true
 " it is that our destiny depends solely on thy will! We refused to
 " accept the reasonable proposals made by Eteocles: elated with
 " our superior numbers, and the valour of our soldiers nothing
 " would content us but a battle: we fought, and were vanquished.
 " Creon also, vain of his prosperity, like a man of low birth, who
 " suddenly, from a state of indigence, is raised to wealth, has at
 " length suffered the punishment due to his pride. Oh infatuated
 " Thebans! Oh citizens, rash and imprudent! why, instead of
 " growing wise by the just chastisements of heaven, which you
 " have so often felt, do you madly exalt yourselves above Fate, and
 " listen less to your reason than to particular conjunctions? Unhap-
 " py are those states, which having it in their power to avoid the
 " horrors of war by treaties, chuse rather to terminate their quar-
 " rels by the sword than by the laws of equity."

The officer, in answer to the questions of Adraustus*, says plainly, that the dead are recovered and honoured with funeral rites. One would think he ought to have begun with this circumstance, in which those to whom he was sent were so greatly interested. He

* Adraustus speaks here, if we follow Milton's correction; but, according to the ordinary editions, it is the Chorus.

adds, that the bodies of the seven chiefs inclosed in coffins are to be brought to Eleusis; but that the others are all buried in the valley of Cytheron: that Theseus himself had paid them funeral honours, that he had called himself their father; and, to express his pious regard to the principal warriors, he would bury them with his own hands.

This narration, and the approach of the beloved dead, awake the tenderness of Adrastus and the women; they prepare to celebrate the funerals. There is here a singular mixture of joy and grief, of exultation and mourning. The seven coffins are brought upon the stage; each mother and each wife weeps her son and her husband; and Adrastus regulates (if we may be allowed to say so) the funeral songs, answering the Chorus verse by verse. This is the true *mos* of the Greeks, and the *Leffus* of the Latins, of which we have already had several examples. All this is more proper for representation than for reading.

A C T IV.

Theseus, as he enters, declares, that he is unwilling to renew the grief of Adrastus, by requiring of him a particular account of the unhappy war he had carried on against Thebes; but, amazed at the boldness and valour of the seven captains who had besieged this great city, whose strength he had himself experienced, he is desirous of knowing them; that is, their character, not their exploits. “ For, “ how absurd is it, continues he, to enquire or to explain the “ particular circumstances of the battle, wherein each person, wholly “ taken up in defending himself, or attacking his enemy, scarce “ preserves presence of mind sufficient to acquit himself of his “ duty”. This is a just and satirical stroke against minute narrations.

Adrastus, pointing first to the coffin of Capaneus, says, “ He “ was wealthy without insolence, simple in his manners, and an “ enemy to that over-bearing pride which riches inspire: he was “ abstemious himself, and a great contemner of those who spent “ their time in feasting and pleasures; being persuaded that no “ man could be at once luxurious and just. He was a faithful “ friend, and particularly to the absent; sincere, but elegant and “ obliging; a most exact observer of his word, even to slaves: “ such was Capaneus. This, continues he, is Eteocles, a young “ hero, not much favoured with the gifts of fortune, but rich in

"honours; so disinterested were the services he rendered to his country, that he never could be persuaded to accept of any rewards; and refused even the bounty of his friends, through an apprehension that his integrity might be corrupted, or that their gifts might prove a constraint to him. He hated bad citizens, not the state; and made a just distinction between the commonwealth, and those who rendered it odious, by governing it ill. The third is Hippomadon, who, from his most early youth, had the courage and resolution to despise the pleasures of a voluptuous life, and to spend his days in a rural retirement: he lived austere, and inured his body to the most robust exercises, that he might make himself a useful warrior to his country. Parthenopius, the son of Atalanta, is the fourth; and although an Arcadian, he was brought up in Argos. The graces of his form, his gentle manners, and his prudent reserve, gained him the affection of the citizens, and the whole state. He had nothing of that factious spirit, and insolent demeanour, so insupportable in a citizen, but more especially so in a foreigner. He fought for Argos more like a native than a stranger: although he was adored by the women, yet he was never known to forget that modesty so becoming to his blooming years, nor to give the least taint to his virtue. As for Tydeus, I shall pronounce his eulogium in few words: he knew better how to fight than to speak: he was well skilled in all the stratagems of war; and though inferior to his brother Meleager in all other knowledge, yet he equalled him in the military art. War was all his science, greedy of glory, full of ardour and courage; in him, his noble exploits were eloquence: Such, prince, are the characters of those heroes who fought against Thebes; nor after hearing them oughtest thou to be surprised, that they were capable of sacrificing their lives for their country." Adraustus adds, that this heroism was the fruit of their education, upon which he pronounces a sentence concerning the advantages of a right education. I shall say nothing of the characters; the reader is doubtless sensible of the extreme delicacy with which they are drawn; at least they give us an idea of the virtue of the ancient Greeks, and of their notions concerning it.

Adraustus, interrupted a moment by the Chorus, wholament their brave and unfortunate sons, resumes his discourse, to give a short description of the two other chiefs, whose bodies could not be brought into Attica. One of them is Amphiaraus, who was swallowed alive in his chariot by the earth. Adraustus makes this circum-

circumstance the subject of an eulogium on him, as if the Gods had taken him away*. Sophocles has given the same turn to the death of Oedipus at Colene. As for Polynices, in praising his merit, the king of Argos contents himself with saying, that this prince was his friend and ally, long before his voluntary cession of the crown of Thebes, and the situation of his affairs obliged him to take refuge in Argos. He says nothing concerning his body; doubtless because the poet supposes that Antigone† had paid him the last duties at the price of her life. Adrastus concludes with entreating Theseus to regulate the pomp of their funerals in such a manner, that Capaneus may be distinguished as having been consumed with the sacred fire, and that the four others may be placed upon one funeral fire.

Theseus will not suffer the ladies to approach the bodies, as usual; nor to open the coffins, for fear they should be shocked with the ghastly appearance of the dead, who had remained so long unburied. Adrastus concludes with this pathetic exclamation :
 " Ah miserable mortals ! what madness is it that thus engages you
 " in wars, and forces you to murder each other ? Peace be to your
 " remains. Alas ! life is already but too short ; why then should
 " we take a cruel pleasure in abridging it ?"

This reflection introduces the Interlude, which is made up of the cries and lamentations of the Chorus. The mothers express their grief by funeral songs, while the pile for Capaneus is erecting. The summit of this pile is seen near a rock, upon the top of which a new personage appears : this is Evadne, the wife of Capaneus, who diffuses a new interest into the fifth act.

ACT V.

Evadne openly declares, that she is determined to follow her husband, and to throw herself upon his pile as soon as it is kindled : no obstacle, she says, shall be of force sufficient to hinder her from enjoying the pleasure of dying with him she loves ; and that it was

* Amyot (in his Plutarch, treating of the manner of the ancient poets) makes Eschylus speak thus concerning Amphiarus :

" Il ne veut point sembler juste mais l'être,
 " Aimant vertu en pensée profonde
 " Dont nous voyons ordinairement naître
 " Sages conseils où tout honneur abonde.

+ See the Antigone of Sophocles, Act. II.

to execute this design that she left her father's house. All this is expressed with great tenderness.

Immediately the aged Iphis, her father, and the father also of Eteocles, appears : he comes from Argos full of melancholy apprehensions, to seek his daughter Evadne, whom, he says, has fled with an intent to die upon the body of her husband. This resolution being so deeply fixed in her mind, that for a long time she had been carefully watched to prevent her executing it; but that at length she found means to escape : he only guesses that she is come to Eleusis, and asks news of her of the Chorus ; but Evadne prevents their answer, by making herself known without quitting her rock.

Her father, surprised to see her in that place, and in the midst of a funeral ceremony, adorned as if she was preparing for her second nuptials, asks her the cause of it : she answers at first in an enigmatical way ; she tells him that she is preparing for a great triumph; for a victory that will distinguish her above all other wives. "I am not able, says she afterwards, to survive Capaneus; therefore I am going to mingle my ashes with his in this funeral pile." Iphis, in vain conjures her to quit this fatal design ; it is now no longer possible to save her. At the moment when the body of Capaneus is burning, she throws herself into the midst of the flames.

Her father and the Chorus send forth loud cries ; vain are their lamentations: Evadne is suddenly consumed by the flames : and, what is surprising enough, all this passes in a manner in the view of the audience ; at least they must see Evadne fall, and they have no reason to doubt but she is fallen into the flames, behind the decorations ; which shews, that the ancients, who were great lovers of theatrical representations, were very curious in the management of their machines. It is evident by several parts of the text, that Pliny contradicts Euripides on this occasion. Pliny * says, that the body of any person who was killed by lightning, was never suffered to be burnt upon a pile, but only buried in the earth ; and that this was a religious tradition. Euripides, it is true, appears to be of this opinion, from a passage in the fourth act, where he makes Theseus and Adrastus say that Capaneus being struck with fire from heaven ought to be buried apart, as a sacred corps. *That a grave should be prepared for him, near the pile wheron the bodies of the four other chiefs were to be burnt ; and that they should leave this care to*

* Pliny's Nat. Hist. B. II. C. 54. Hominem ita exanimatum (fulmine) cremari fas non est. Condi terrâ religio tradidit.

the domestics, while they themselves performed the funerals of the rest. This is very plain, especially from what the Chorus says, (verse 980) *That already might be seen the bed of state prepared for Capaneus, and the sacred tomb.* And yet, at the beginning of the fifth act, Evadne seems to be very sure that the body of her husband is to be burnt: she comes, she says, *to throw herself into the flaming pile, that her ashes may be placed in the same urn with those of her husband.* And what destroys, as it should seem, the words of Adrastus in the fourth act, is this speech of the Chorus to Evadne (verse 1009) *Dost thou see this pile near which thou hast placed thyself? there lies the body of thy husband who was struck with thunder.* Yet more, Evadne herself is so well convinced that Capaneus is upon this pile, that she says several times over, *She is going to acquire immortal glory, by throwing herself off the rock into the flames, that her ashes may be mingled with those of her husband; and that, now at last, her body being laid beside that of Capaneus, she shall descend contented into the kingdom of Prospine.* And (verse 1065) she says, *I will cast myself upon this pile where Capaneus lies.* And a moment afterwards, when she is upon the point of throwing herself down, she says, *Bebold me ready, 'tis done, this glorious act will fill my fair with grief; but oh how sweet is it to die with a beloved husband!* And lastly, a child, whom the poet does not name, but who appears afterwards to be Sthenelus, the son of Capaneus, brings to Iphis, his grandfather, the ashes of this warrior. *Here, says he, are the remains of my father, taken from his funeral pile.* All these proofs united, are too clear and too strong not to convince us that what was said in the fourth act, did not exclude Capaneus from the honours of a pile; and signified nothing more, than that he ought to have a particular pile for himself, opposite to that erected for the other four captains.

It is to elude the force of these proofs, and contradict our own reason, to suppose with Barnes, that Euripides indeed allows Capaneus a pile, but an honorary one only, on which his corps was not burnt; and that this he does merely to make room for the voluntary sacrifice of Evadne. But could Evadne be deceived by the representation as well as the Chorus; she, whom the Chorus had assured that the body of Capaneus was upon this pile; and who accordingly speaks as if she saw it there? Yet more, if it was a point of religion among the Greeks, not to burn the bodies of those who were struck dead with lightning, could Evadne have been ignorant of it? Now it is certain that she is very sure of the contrary; therefore it is plain, that what was a point of religion in the

time of Pliny, was not so in the time of Euripides; or else it was moderated, and those bodies were decreed to be burned by themselves. But to return to Iphis:

This Argive, in his anguish, wishes he had never been a father. He had lost a son before the walls of Thebes, and now he beholds a daughter perish: he will no more return to a place which must now appear a dreadful solitude to him; and which will always present to his tortured imagination the image of a daughter who became the victim of her affection for her husband. Death, he says, is his only resource. Here the Chorus divide. It is supposed that the flames have consumed the flesh of these dead warriors, and that their bones are brought to their mothers.

A child (we shall see presently that it is Sthenelus, and there are several children, of whom he is one) brings the remains of Capaneus. The two Chorus's renew their lamentations; but the attention of all is turned upon Capaneus. The child talks of revenging his death upon the Thebans. "They are no more, says "he, oh mother! these beloved sons are no more." He speaks to them all, and to the lady who heads one of the demi-chorus's; but it is not plain whether she is the wife of Iphis or not. "They are "no more, continues he, they are reduced to ashes, they are dis- "persed in the air, and are fled to the shores of Styx. Oh father! "shall I not one day take arms to revenge thy death?" Iphis adds his wishes to those of the youth; the hope of revenge alleviates the grief of Sthenelus; and Iphis, pressing the urn to his bosom, indulges his sorrow for the melancholy fate of his son and daughter.

Theseus enters and interrupts their mourning. "Adrastus, and "ye Argive matrons, says he, these children have brought you the "remains of those brave warriors which I have recovered from "their inhuman enemies. The state and I have granted your re- "quest; remember what we have done for you; and let this re- "membrance engage you to pay our city the honours which you "owe it, in perpetuating this gratitude in your posterity; and thou, "oh Jupiter, and all the Gods! be witnesses of this signal benefit "which we have conferred on the Argives; and of the return we "claim for it."

ADRASTUS. Oh Theseus! we are truly sensible of thy generosity; thou hast succoured the Argives in their utmost need. Our gratitude will be immortal, and equal to thy benefits.

THESEUS. Hast thou any thing more to ask? speak freely.

ADRAS-

ADRASTUS. We have nothing more to wish for but the prosperity of thee and thy states. What blessings dost thou not deserve?

THESEUS. I accept thy favourable wishes, and form the same for thee.

As Adrastus is preparing to take leave of Theseus, Minerva suddenly appears to them, and forbids the king of Athens to deliver up to the Argives the ashes of the dead. She requires, that before their departure, they shall bind themselves by a solemn oath never to bear arms against Athens; and to make an eternal alliance with that city. She ordains, that king Adrastus shall take the oath in the name of all his people, and bind himself by dreadful imprecations against Argos, never to violate it. That this oath shall be authenticated by a religious ceremony, and the words of it engraved upon a sacred tripod, designed by Hercules for the temple of Delphos. That after they have sprinkled it with the blood of victims offered in sacrifice, they shall place this monument of the eternal fidelity, sworn by the Argives, in the temple of Apollo; and that the sacred knife with which they cut the throats of their sheep upon the tripod, shall be buried in the earth, near the pile of the Argive warriors, to be one day a terror to any of the Argives, who, forgetting their oaths, should take up arms against the city of Athens. Theseus was also to yield up a sacred wood to purify the Argives there.

The Goddess afterwards addresses herself to the children of the deceased warriors: she foretells that they shall one day revenge their fathers, and destroy Thebes; and that the name of Epigones, which shall be given them by Greece, and their glorious expedition against Thebes, shall be the subject of admiration to all posterity. These Epigons, or the children of the seven or eight heroes who fell before Thebes, made themselves very famous: there were nine of them, namely, Ægialus, the son of Adrastus; Thersander, the son of Polynices; Diomede, the son of Tydeus; Sthenelus, the son of Capaneus; Stratolaus, the son of Parthenopas; Polydore, the son of Hippomedon; Alcmeon, and Amphilocus, the sons of Amphiareus; and Milon, the son of Eteocles. Of the eight fathers, seven perished; Adrastus only remained. Eteocles was not considered as one of the seven chiefs; he being the brother-in-law of Capaneus. Ten years afterwards the sons of these heroes revenged their deaths under the conduct of Alcmeon.

But

But we have dwelt too long upon this fabulous part of antiquity : Euripides composed this political tragedy merely to flatter the Athenians. It is founded upon a part of their history, which they were very fond of, as it afforded them some advantages over Argos. Such sorts of interests cannot be supposed to affect us much ; and whatever we may say for this, they do not render the subject interesting to us. Theseus promises Minerva to obey her commands ; and king Adrastus prepares to take the oath the Goddess had prescribed to him.

Iphigenia in Aulis, and Iphigenia in Tauris.

Both these tragedies of Euripides are entirely translated ; the former in the second volume, and the latter in the third.

R H E-

R H E S U S.

A

TRAGEDY by EURIPIDES.

IN Ovid's Epistles, Penelope writes thus to Ulysses:

“ Retulit & ferro Rhesumque Dolonaque casos;
“ Utque fit hic somno proditus, ille dolis.
“ Ausus es, o nimium nimiumque oblite tuorum
“ Thracia nocturno tangere castra dolo,
“ Totque simul mactare viros adjutus ab uno:
“ At bene cautus eras, & memor ante mei.
“ Usque metu micuere sinus; dum victor amicum
Dietus es Ismariis esse per agmen equis.”

These beautiful lines, the delicacy and spirit of which cannot be wholly preserved in a translation, contain the subject of the Rhesus of Euripides. I could not have given a happier sketch of it; besides, the tragedy itself will easily make this known as we examine it.

The scene is in the Trojan camp, before the walls of Troy: the persons of the drama are Hector, Eneas, Paris, Dolon, Rhesus king of Thrace, and his Equerry, on the Trojan side. On the Greeks, Ulysses, and Diomede. Minerva, and the Muse Terpsichore, the mother of Rhesus, act also their several parts; and the Chorus is composed of the officers, and particularly of the centinels in the Trojan camp. The subject is nothing more than the nocturnal stratagem of Ulysses, and Diomede, who kill Rhesus in his tent.

And here I shall take notice of one thing, which perhaps would not have escaped the reader, even in this extract: It is, that the stile and manner of this tragedy seems so different from the genius of Euripides, that it has been long doubted whether it is a work of his, and if it does not rather belong to Sophocles. Indeed we find in it neither the prologues of the former, nor his pathetic strokes of nature;

ture; while, on the contrary, we see it has that justness and art of dialogue peculiar to the latter. However, notwithstanding the variety of the action, it is not the best piece in this collection; and besides, *Rhesus* having always been numbered among the tragedies of Euripides, we ought not, upon bare conjectures, to take it from him: and indeed it is of very little consequence to our design whether it belongs to him or to Sophocles, or even to any other more ancient author; as Scaliger, without the least probability, supposes; or whether it is the production of some cotemporary genius, as it would be easier for me to prove by conjecture, since Sophon inherited the genius of his father Sophocles, and wrote quite in his taste.

A C T I.

The scene represents the Trojan camp, underneath the walls of their city, probably on one side of the stage; and on the opposite side at a distance is seen the ocean, the Grecian vessels, and their camp near them. The Chorus, that is, one of the warriors who compose it, says to another, "Go, and awaken Hector." This marks the time when the action begins, which without doubt is midnight. Hector is called, he answers, and instantly appears like a general, always active, always prepared, and incapable of taking the least repose. He asks them eagerly the cause of their awakening him. The sentinel does not answer his question immediately, but as if he dreaded some surprize, presses him to arm, and to put the whole camp likewise under arms. Hector, who finds that all is quiet, supposes he is struck with a panic terror: at length the soldier tells him the cause of his apprehensions. It is, that in the Grecian camp, and their vessels, there seems to be extraordinary and unusual lights: he adds, that he believes the enemies are assembling in Agamemnon's quarter; and that, in a word, the whole Grecian army is in motion.

Hector is so far from being terrified at this news, that he supposes the Grecians, having been worsted in battle by him the day before, are now preparing to make their escape, favoured by the night; and sighing, he thus addresses himself to Jupiter: "Oh sovereign "of the Gods! thou deprivedst me then of my victory, and "snatcheth my prey out of my hands!" He would pursue the Greeks and set fire to their vessels; but the priests, he says, have warned him not to hazard a combat in the night; yet that the enemies may not draw any advantage from these timid councils, he resolves

resolves not to be governed by them, but to pursue the Greeks and make their flight bloody.

The Chorus represent to him, that nothing is less certain than this supposed flight; and that, without doubt, these fires are, with too much reason, suspected to conceal some other design. This is in the sequel found to be but too true; but Hector, who knows not what fear is, cannot be persuaded that those enemies, over whom he had been victorious the day before, could think of anything but flight. Nothing could mark the character of Hector better than this first scene, which is likewise natural and lively. The Trojan prince resolves to put all his soldiers under arms, when Eneas enters in great haste.

Eneas enquires the cause of the noise he had heard in the camp.
 "Arm thyself, says Hector to him. Why, resumes the former,
 "have the Greeks prepared any ambuscade for us? They are flying,
 "replies the general." The other requires some proofs of the truth of this assertion; but no other are alledged than the fires that are seen in their camp. Hereupon Eneas condemns both the opinion and design of Hector. He says, "that there is no appearance of the enemies flight, and that they run the greatest risk by attacking the Greeks. If the Greeks should have the advantage, pursues he, how shall we be able to take refuge under our walls? how shall we pass the night with the horse upon the pallisados, and cross the bridges? But if they should be worsted, dost thou imagine that Achilles, although full of resentment, will suffer us to set fire to the ships with impunity?" Eneas therefore maintains that Hector's scheme is very dangerous, and proceeds rather from an unbridled ardour, which is his character, than from the prudent foresight of a general. Thus *frankly* did they speak *in the good old times*; but this sincerity no longer subsists. Eneas gives it as his opinion, that they should send some person to reconnoitre the enemies camp, to find out the cause of this movement; whether there is any thing to fear or to hope from it; and whether it is a flight or an ambuscade: to the end that they may afterwards take such resolutions as will be found most necessary. The Chorus approve of the advice of Eneas; and as there is a council of war summoned in haste, Hector sees himself obliged to acquiesce: he therefore gives orders for calming the minds of the soldiers, and takes upon himself the care of sending a spy into the field; determined, however, to pursue the Greeks, if it should be found that they are really attempting to fly. He afterwards with a loud voice asks, which of the officers will serve his country

upon this occasion, and undertake the dangerous but honourable commission of discovering the designs of the enemies?

Dolon, one of the principal officers, instantly offers himself: he seizes eagerly this occasion of signalizing his courage; but he insists upon one condition first: "What, says he, shall be the reward of this action, if crowned with success? Make thy demand, replies "Hector; whatever it be, it shall be granted, provided it is not my office of general.

DOLON. I do not envy thee that supreme honour.

HECTOR. Well then, thou shalt be my kinsman, and the son-in-law of Priam.

DOLON. I do not carry my ambition so far as to wish to be allied to sovereigns. I place my happiness in a more equal marriage.

HECTOR. If gold has more charms for thee, thou shalt be gratified that way.

DOLON. I have wealth sufficient; my moderation has set bounds to my desires.

HECTOR. What is it then that thou wisheth for in Ilion? speak.

DOLON. When thou returnest victorious, and loaded with Grecian spoils, wilt thou promise to give me what I shall demand of thee?

HECTOR. I will, excepting only the persons of the Grecian generals.

DOLON. Sacrifice them, prince; I ask no mercy for Menelaus.

HECTOR. Is it the son of Oileus thou wouldest have?

DOLON. No: the Grecian education, soft and effeminate, produce not men who love labour; their hands are not inured to toil.

HECTOR. Which of the officers then amongst our enemies dost thou chuse for thy reward?

DOLON. I have already told thee, prince, that wealth has no allurements for me; I am satisfied without it.

HECTOR. Well, thou shalt chuse any part of the spoils that please thee best.

DOLON. They are all due to the Gods. Offer them devoutly to heaven, and place them in the temples.

HECTOR. What greater reward dost thou desire than those I have already offered thee?

DOLON. The horses of Achilles: this is the only reward worthy the greatness of my enterprize.

HECTOR. Thy desires are the same with mine. I have raised my hopes to the possession of those immortal steeds. Neptune gave them to Peleus: they are the gift of a God; nevertheless I will sacrifice my inclination to the public good, and yield thee the chariot of Achilles.

DOLON. For this reward I go. Satisfied with my share of the spoils, I shall think myself the happiest of the Phrygians: nor oughtest thou, oh Hector! to envy me this only object of my wishes. Thou art the sovereign of this country, and may command all things in it; all conspire to gratify thy desires."

It is this noble ambition of the Trojan officer which Virgil has expressed in these verses :

" Qui quondam castra at Danaum speculator adiret,
 " Ausus Pelidae pretium sibi poscere currus.
 " Illum Tydides alio pro talibus ausis
 " Afficit pretio: nec equis aspirat Achillis *."

But with the luckless fortune of his sire,
 Who claim'd Pelides' coursers for his hire,
 When sent the Grecian army to explore;
 Vain fool! he ventur'd, but return'd no more;
 Slain by Tydides' hand, resign'd his breath,
 And shar'd a juster recompence in death !

I have quoted these verses here, to shew the high value which the ancients set upon this reward, and how their ideas of it were perpetuated among the Romans. It is from this esteem of it that the Chorus congratulate Dolon, telling him, that indeed his courage is great, but that the reward is equal to it. It is on this account that he prefers it even to the royal alliance which Hector had offered him, and which he, like a bad courtier, did not scruple to refuse, without considering whether he should not offend the son of Priam, the presumptive heir to the throne, and already a king, by preferring the horses to one of his sisters. Such is the prejudice for fable, which we must be contented to take as we find it: however its absurdity is productive of great beauties; witness the scene we have just read.

Dolon, being ready to depart, tells the Chorus that he is going to disguise himself; and the disguise he chuses is the skin of a wolf. He says, that when he draws nigh the Grecian intrenchments, he

* Eneid. l. 12. v. 351.

will imitate those creatures manner of walking, to avoid giving the enemies any suspicion. This artifice savours too much of the ignorance of antiquity in stratagems of war, compared with our age, not to shock us extremely: however the Chorus applaud this fine stratagem, and make vows for its success. They wish that Dolon may kill either Menelaus or Agamemnon; and this conversation, set to musick, concludes the act.

A C T II.

A shepherd of Mount Ida salutes Hector, and tells him that he brings him happy news. Hector, wholly taken up with his warlike schemes, reproves the shepherd, as if he was come to trouble him with some domestic affairs: he bids him go to the palace, and there give an account of those matters that relate to his flocks, and is very much offended that he should address himself to a general, employed about affairs of much greater consequence. The shepherd tells him he is mistaken. "It is war, says he, that the news I bring "thee relates to." He then acquaints him that he has seen a large body of troops pass through the forest of Ida, led by a Thracian chief. Hector supposes this chief to be Rhesus, and the shepherd proceeds with great simplicity to tell him all he had seen. He describes the fear and perplexity of the shepherds, at the sight of these unknown troops; the flight of the sheep upon the tops of the mountains; the manner in which their apprehensions were removed by the scouts of Rhesus; the majestic mien of this Thracian king, who, he says resembles a God; the magnificence of his golden armour; the richness of his equipages; the great number of his soldiers, as well horse as foot, bowmen, and other light armed troops. He thinks it impossible that Achilles himself can resist such a reinforcement. But Hector is not the dupe of these tardy succours: He has gained so many advantages over the Greeks, that he thinks himself strong enough to conquer without Rhesus. "These, says "he, are friends in prosperity, who come to reap the fruits of victory "without having had any share in the dangers of war."

The Chorus, however, advise the Trojan general to accept of this reinforcement; but, vain of his superiority over the Greeks, he confides in his strength. The Chorus press him, and urge the uncertainty of success in war.

They intreat Hector to regard the laws of hospitality, and to receive Rhesus, if not as an ally, yet at least with the respect due to a stranger. The Trojan prince yields to this consideration: however,

ever, the Trojans, who compose the Chorus, rejoice at the arrival of so warlike a chief as Rhesus: they extol his valour to the skies, and offer up prayers for the success of his enterprises.

A C T III.

Rhesus meeting Hector, offers him his arm and his troops: the Trojan says to him, with great plainness, " I am not accustomed to " dissimulation ; therefore it is not possible for me to conceal the " uneasiness thy long delay has given us: thy assistance has been " often intreated at a time when we were in great need of it. Thou " art an ally of the Trojans, it is thy interest as well as ours to sub- " due the Greeks : it is through my friendship that thou reignest " over a powerful kingdom ; and yet it is not thy fault that Troy " is not overthrown. Amongst all our allies, some of whom have " sacrificed their lives for us, and others are continually under arms, " exposed to all the rigours of each season, thou only, as it would " seem, hast preferred ease and pleasure to the glory of serving " friends who merited some returns of gratitude from thee. I re- " peat it, prince, Hector knows not how to dissemble ; and it is to " thyself that he complains of thy conduct."

The Thracian is not offended with these reproaches, but tells him that he will answer him with equal sincerity. " Being obliged " to continue in Thrace, says he, I was more grieved than thou at " the impossibility of succouring Troy. A neighbouring nation ex- " cited such troubles upon my frontiers as broke all my designs. " When I was ready to embark for Ilion, I found the shore died " with the blood of my subjects ; there was a necessity for laying " this storm, and repulsing the enemy. I conquered these invaders, " and having restored quiet and security to Thrace, I hastened to " the assistance of Troy. In my voyage from the Hellespont I " have been long driven about by contrary winds, and have endu- " red many fatigues also in my journey by land. I have therefore " been very far from enjoying that ease and pleasure with which " thou reproachest me. 'Tis true indeed that my arrival is late, " but it is not unseasonable ; for what have the Trojans done these " ten years? They have been conquerors some times and have been " often conquered : they, as well as the Greeks, have suffered the " vicissitudes of war. As for me, I desire only one day to put an " end to this siege. One day will be sufficient for me to subdue " these Greeks, to destroy their towers, and burn their vessels. I
" will

" will in that short space put all to fire and sword ; and the following day I will march from Ilion. I do not desire any of the Trojans to assist me : let this enterprize be left to me, I will effectually repair my long delay."

The Chorus applaud this speech, and lavish a thousand praises on him. Soothed with their flatteries, he adds, that he will not be satisfied with driving the Greeks out of Phrygia : he will go at the head of the Trojans, and carry desolation into the very heart of Greece : but Hector, whom a ten years dangerous war had taught more moderation, and a less ambitious valour, cries out, " Ah ! I should think myself happy, and return thanks to the Gods, if I could only avert the storm with which Ilion is threatened, and recover that security we have lost. For, be assured, prince, Greece is not so easy to be ravaged as thou imaginest."

RHESUS. Are not all the Grecian princes assembled against Troy ?

HECTOR. They are ; but, far from dispersing such enemies, it is with the greatest difficulty that I defend my country against them.

RHESUS. Well, they shall be all destroyed.

HECTOR. Prince, do not destroy thy self, by engaging in these vain projects : let us think only of the present evil.

RHESUS. How ! wilt thou be satisfied with repelling injuries, and set such narrow bounds to thy revenge ?

HECTOR. The kingdom I possess satisfies my ambition ; and what indeed can I wish for more ? But now, prince, chuse thy post in either of the wings, or in the main body ; it shall be as thou pleasest.

RHESUS. No, Hector, I will fight with my Thracians only ; but, if ashamed of the few advantages thou hast yet gained over the enemy, thou grudgeth me the glory of setting fire to the Grecian vessels, yet suffer me at least to oppose Achilles.

HECTOR. Thou canst not fight with that hero.

RHESUS. Why, is he not at the siege of Ilion ?

HECTOR. He is here ; but being offended with the Greeks, he will give them no assistance.

RHESUS. Which of their warriors is most distinguished after him ?

HECTOR. Ajax and Diomede are second in valour to none of the Grecian heroes ; and, yet more, they have Ulysses, a prince as celebrated for his courage as for the power of his eloquence."

Here Hector relates, in few words, all the various stratagems of Ulysses ; how he contrived to get into the temple of Minerva, and car-

carried from thence the *Palladium*; how he had appeared in Troy in different disguises; and what terror and perplexity his wit, always fruitful in expedients for their destruction, gave to the Trojans. Thus the poet finely prepares us for what is to follow, and strongly marks the principal characters, particularly Ulysses, whose head is always full of artful projects; and Rhesus, whose presumptuous valour makes him promise himself nothing less than to kill Ulysses, and vanquish Diomede. Hector, without making any answer to these extravagant boasts, assigns Rhesus and his troops their quarter, and informs them of the watch-word, which is *Phæbus*. He commands the sentinels to perform their duty diligently, and to wait for the return of Dolon, which, he says, must now be speedy if he has not been intercepted. He then retires as well as Rhesus.

The sentinels, who are the Chorus, perceiving that the time for their keeping guard is expired, resolve to go and awaken those whose duty it is to relieve them. For this purpose they divide into two Demi-Choruses, one of which retire to taste the sweets of a morning sleep, which they declare to be the most desirable; while the other, after expressing some slight suspicions concerning Dolon's delay, go out also to call those who are to supply their place: so that the stage remains free, at least towards Hector's tent, when Ulysses and Diomede appear. This address of the poet, in leaving his stage clear, notwithstanding the incumbrance of the Chorus, is a master-stroke not without example. Sophocles has furnished us with one in his *Ajax*.

A C T IV.

Ulysses and Diomede are not perceived, and see no person. It is true indeed that the darkness is not entirely dissipated, and that they do not shew themselves till after they have taken all possible precautions. This scene is extremely natural, and seems reality itself; for the two Grecian princes being now in the midst of the Trojan camp, listen attentively to the least noise, and send their watchful looks on every side. They exhort each other to avoid the sentinels; and by their conversation we find that they know the watch-word, which they have learned from Dolon, who had been taken by them. Ulysses goes directly to Hector's tent, which he knows by the marks Dolon had given of it; but Hector is not there. Thus their attempt fails; for their design was to kill this general of the Trojans; and not finding him in his tent they suppose they are discovered. Afterwards they think the Gods watch over his safety;

and therefore Diomede proposes to go and attack Eneas, or Paris. "But how, says Ulysses, shall we wander through a strange camp, "amidst a thousand inevitable dangers?" He advises, that they should return to their ships, satisfied with their success in killing Dolon, whose spoils they have taken. Thus the audience are immediately acquainted with the fate of the Trojan spy. But Diomede is unwilling to return without having performed some signal exploit; and upon this Minerva appears to them, but in such a manner that she is to be seen and heard by them only.

She finds them full of grief, to think they must return without executing their design. "But, says she to them, if the Gods preserve "Hector, Eneas, and Paris, from your swords, are you ignorant that "Rhesus is a victim worthy of you? If the returning day beholds "him alive, the Greeks are ruined: neither Ajax, nor even Achilles can withstand him; your safety depends upon his destruction." Ulysses, after paying his acknowledgments to his tutelary divinity, asks her which is the tent of the Thracian king; she points it out to him, and particularly charges him to carry off his chariot and horses, as a booty of infinite value.

Ulysses offers Diomede his choice, either of carrying off the chariot, or of killing Rhesus and the soldiers about him: but the son of Tydeus, born a hero, accepts the latter exploit, without a moment's pause, and leaves the other to be performed by Ulysses, as better suited to his artful genius. It is apparently upon this circumstance that in Ovid, Ajax thus reproaches Ulysses:

"Luce nihil gestum, nihil est Diomede remoto.
"Si semel ista datis meritis tam vilibus arma;
"Dividite; & major pars sit Diomedis in illis.
"Quo tamen hæc Ithaco, qui clam, qui semper inermis
"Rem gerit, & furtis incautum decipit hostem;"

A priest made pris'ner, Pallas made a prey :
But none of all these actions done by day:
Nor ought of these was done, and Diomede away.
If on such petty merits you confer
So vast a prize, let each his portion share;
Make a just dividend; and if not all,
The greater part to Diomede will fall.
But why for Ithacus such arms as those,
Who naked, and by night invades his foes?

DRYD.
Minerva

Minerva suddenly perceives Paris approach. This proves extremely unlucky for the exploit she had ordered and undertaken to direct. Diomede is for attacking him with open force, but the destinies do not permit that he should take the life of this prince; at least Minerva declares so: and while the two Greeks conceal themselves from the view of Paris, the Goddess amuses him under the form of Venus. For the Divinities of fable make what impressions they please upon the senses.

Accordingly Minerva speaks loud enough to be heard at a distance, and yet she is only heard by Ulysses and Diomede. Sometimes she appears in her own form, sometimes in that of Venus. We have already taken notice of something like this in the Iphigenia in Tauris: we must admit all these wonders of the ancient fable, if we would converse with the Greek poets. But that which shocks us most in this interposition of the Goddess is, that by it the glory of Ulysses and Diomede is lessened, since, assisted by a divinity, they had nothing to do but to strike a secure blow. This is a fault which has been often objected to Homer in our age, without admitting the allegory as any justification. Apparently the Athenians were fonder of this way of writing than we are; they, who by Minerva understood Prudence, and by Venus Beauty, yet without carrying the refinement of allegory so far as Tasso and other moderns have done*. Another error in this fabulous part is, that Minerva, by a premeditated design, deceives Paris, under the form of Venus, the favourite Goddess of that soft and effeminate prince. This is more difficult to excuse, notwithstanding the allegory; therefore I do not undertake to justify the ancient fable here: it is sufficient for me to lay it plainly before my readers; and, if possible, to prevail on them to admit, for a moment, these notions of the Athenians, without examining too closely whether they are good or bad, absurd or reasonable; persuaded only, that they were then received as current coin.

Paris, uneasy at a report spread about the camp, that some spies have got access to it, comes to awaken Hector, and warn him to be upon his guard. Here it is that the counterfeit Venus amuses

* Plutarch admits, that in the fictions of Homer many useful morals are concealed; but he condemns those studied allegories which certain critics are so fond of discovering in them. "Whoever, says he, will examine closely, the fables and fictions which are most faulty in that poet, will therein find a great deal of instruction. But by some, these fables are tortured, and, as one may say, drawn by horses into allegorical explanations."

him and removes his suspicions by a formal falsehood, while Ulysses and Diomede, to whom she afterwards speaks, although they are at a great distance, return by her advice, having now executed their design; that is, they have massacred Rhesus, and taken away his steeds, without giving them time to taste the pastures of Troy, or drink the waters of Xanthus, as Virgil expresses it.

“Ardentesque avertit equos in castra priusquam
“Pabula guitascent Trojæ, Xanthumque bibissent.”

Æneid. I. i. v. 472.

The tumult occasioned by this massacre has wakened part of the camp: the soldiers are seen running in confusion on one side, and the other, crying out *Kill, kill.* This scene is the same with that of the Chorus, with which the opera of Theseus so beautifully opens.

“Avançons, avançons, que rien ne nous étonne :
“Frappons, perçons, frappons : qu'on n'épargne personne ;
“Il faut périr ; il faut périr ;
“Il faut vaincre ou mourir,”

One of the Demi Chorus's meets Ulysses, and pointing their swords at his breast, ask him, with dreadful cries, *Who be is, from whence be comes, and what be is doing there?* Ulysses presents himself with a good enough grace for a warrior accused by the poets of having more artifice than valour. The other Demi-Chorus enter and take his part. They content themselves with demanding the watch-word of Ulysses; he gives it them, and they suffer him to escape. This so imminent danger weakens a little the objection above mentioned, since Minerva, it is plain, does not guard Ulysses here; or rather, this passage justifies the allegory, because, in effect, Ulysses is, in so delicate a conjuncture, preserved by his own presence of mind and calm resolution.

Meantime the sentinels, who are yet ignorant of the misfortune that had happened in Rhesus's quarter, discourse with each other upon the boldness of their enemies, who had thus insinuated themselves into their camp. They begin to suspect Ulysses when it is too late; but while they reflect upon this circumstance, and express their fears of Hector's resentment, if the enemy has really, through their negligence, made their escape out of the midst of the camp, they see a man approach who is wounded, and who deplotes his own fate and that of Rhesus.

A C T V.

This man is the equerry of the Thracian king : he seeks Hector, to load him with reproaches, for the murder of Rhesus, which he lays to his charge. He laments the death of his master, killed in so disgraceful a manner. Had he died gloriously in battle, his country would have been consoled for his loss. He afterwards relates all he knows concerning the horrid slaughter ; the author of which he was not able to discover. No guards, he says, were posted in the quarter where the Thracians lay, who, fatigued with their march, and supposing themselves in perfect security, thought they might indulge themselves with a few hours rest. Mean time the equerry being roused from his sleep, by a strange kind of solicitude about his horses, saw two men wandering about the tents in the dark ; he took them for marauders, either Trojans, or some of the allies. He cried out to them, he threatened them, and they fled. He returned to his tent, and fell asleep again ; but a horrible dream tormented him. He thought he saw two hungry wolves, who threw themselves upon his horses and pierced their sides : he waked as before, and immediately heard the groans of the dying soldiers ; and even found himself stained with the blood of his master. He rose up and sought for his arms : at that instant he received a wound with a sword, and fell upon the ground, and thus disabled heard the assassins drive away his chariot ; but he was not able to discover who these assassins were ; and imputes this barbarous action to the Trojans. The Chorus in vain endeavour to undeceive him, when Hector enters with fury in his eyes.

It is the guard against whom the prince is enraged. He tells them that by their negligence the Greeks have entered the camp, and after committing a most horrible slaughter, have got off with impunity. Without doubt, says he, Ulysses is now laughing at the Trojans and Hector, but the sentinels shall suffer for it; accordingly the general threatens to punish their neglect with death. The Chorus justify themselves, and endeavour to appease him, but the Thracian interrupts them. " Why punish them, cries he, why by this poor artifice wouldest thou deceive an ally ? thou thyself art the assassin ; it is by thy hand these fatal blows have been given. Our tents are full of dead and dying. This is thy work ; all thy artifice cannot impose upon me. That vile avarice which made thee envy Rhesus his chariot and steeds, prompted thee to plunge a poniard into the bosom of thy allies. Thou solicited their succour, they flew to give it thee,

" and

THE
T R O J A N C A P T I V E S.

A

T R A G E D Y b y E U R I P I D E S.

THIS piece, in which Hecuba is one of the chief characters, as well as in the former tragedy of the same author*, which is likewise called *Hecuba*, is however so different, that in the order of reading, it ought to stand first, since the *Hecuba* is indeed, properly speaking, only the sequel of the *Trojan Captives*. In the former, the heroine is supremely wretched, both as a queen and mother; for, after being deprived of a crown, and reduced to slavery, she has also the misery to see her son Polydore murdered by a treacherous ally, and her daughter Polyxena sacrificed to the ghost of Achilles, in a foreign country. Here it is not only the queen of Troy, and the mother of so many heroes who weeps her calamities, but a great number of Trojan ladies also, whom the conquering Greeks considered as the best part of their booty, and whom they shared among them by lot: and as soon as fortune has decided to what masters they shall fall, they are to be instantly sent on board their vessels. It is true indeed, that in this piece, Polyxena is likewise sacrificed, and Astyanax is put to death; therefore Hecuba, as more distressed than any of the captive ladies, has a right to a greater portion of compassion; yet still the subject is not her misfortunes alone. As for Polyxena's being in this play sacrificed in one place, and in the former in another, with some other contradictory circumstances, these are liberties which different traditions gave the Greek poets, and of which Euripides has made no scruple to take advantage of more than once.

The scene is laid in the Grecian camp, before the walls of Troy. The tent of Agamemnon, their general, is the principal object in view. There it is that the fates of the Trojan ladies are decided by

* See the *Hecuba* of Euripides, in this volume.

lot; and in the space before the tent those events are represented which fortune, or the caprice of the Greeks give rise to. Euripides has not scrupled to borrow some incidents here from his other pieces, so fruitful a source of tragical and interesting subjects did the Iliad appear to him!

The prologue, or the exposition of the subject, is given us by Neptune and Minerva. The other persons of the Drama are Hecuba; Cassandra, her daughter; Andromache, the widow of Hector; Helen, Menelaus, Talthybius, and a Chorus of captive ladies.

ACT I.

Neptune appears alone. Compassion recalls him to the city of Troy, which he and Apollo had built: he laments the desolate condition to which the Greeks have reduced it. He gives a short, but lively description of Troy, now reduced to ashes, and by that fatal horse, which, says he,

* "S'en va devenir
"L'éternel entretien des siècles à venir."

He gives us some slight sketches of the subject, namely, the assembling of the Greeks in the general's tent, and the division of the booty. He relates what precedes the action of the play; that Polyxena has been sacrificed upon the tomb of Achilles; and that Agamemnon, without any regard to the reverence due to Apollo, whose priestess Cassandra was, had dared to espouse that princess, contrary to her inclinations. He takes a melancholy leave of this city, once so glorious, and now levelled with the earth by the rage of Juno and Pallas.

Minerva, hearing herself named, appears, and stops Neptune as he is retiring. She prevails upon him, by some obliging expressions, to allow her a moment's conversation with him. Satisfied with the revenge she had taken of Troy, she seems to enter into the interests of its miserable remains; or, rather offended with the Greeks for neglecting to punish the sacrilege of Ajax, who had inhumanly dragged Cassandra from her altar, where she had taken sanctuary, the Goddess resolves to sacrifice them to her resentment, and render their return fatal to them. She has already obtained storms and thunder of Jupiter, and she now intreats Neptune to render

* Racine's Iphigenia, ACT I. SCENE V.

the sea tempestuous. Juno makes the same request to Eolus in Virgil, and almost in the same terms.

“ Incute vim ventis, submersasque obrue puppes,
“ Aut age diversas, & disjice corpora ponto.”

*Wing all thy furious winds, o'erwhelm the train,
Disperse, or plunge their vessels in the main.* Pitt's Virgil.

Neptune promises Minerva his assistance, and both go off the stage to prepare the most dreadful tempests for the fleet. This anticipated punishment of the Greeks is more artful than at first it appears to be. It prejudices the spectator in favour of the unhappy Trojans, and leaves him contented till the end of the action, in the hope that the cruelties he has seen will not remain unpunished.

At that instant a great number of women are seen round Hecuba, who lies prostrate on the ground, near Agamemnon's tent, like a person overwhelmed with grief; such as we have beheld her in a scene of the tragedy that bears her name*. The Trojan ladies exhort her to rise; but having need of consolation themselves, they weep while they endeavour to comfort her; and cannot help exclaiming, as Virgil has since said,

“ Fuimus Troes, fuit Ilium & ingens,
“ Gloria Teucrorum.”

“ Ilion is no more, and the glory of Troy is vanished.” Hecuba sighing, seizes this melancholy thought. Grief has so exhausted her strength, that she is not able to raise herself from the ground; but, being assisted by the women, she gives a detail of her misfortunes in funeral stanzas. “ The wife of Priam, the mother of so many “ princes †, the queen of an extensive territory; all she has now re- “ maining is a miserable life, which she is to linger out in captivity. “ The sight of the shore from whence the Greeks are preparing to em- “ bark makes her redouble her complaints. Whither shall she now “ be dragged; and for what unknown region shall she be forced to “ quit her beloved country?” The Chorus mix in her complaints. It must be observed, that the ladies who compose it are not of the first rank. On the other side are heard loud cries and lamentations. They proceed from the other Trojan ladies, who are shut up in a tent, and who perceive that the time of their departure and

* Hecuba, A& III. † To the number of fifty.

their

their slavery is near. All the rest of this act turns upon the anxiety of these ladies, concerning their fate. It is the mourning of a company of terrified women, who have no hope, no resource left, and continued complaints which are extremely natural, but very difficult to express in our language. The whole shews plainly, that their fate will soon be pronounced ; and that the Greeks are casting lots for them in the general's tent.

A C T II.

Talthybius, Agamemnon's herald, comes to declare their doom. Every word he speaks is a stroke of thunder to the wretched Hecuba ; for he tells her that Agamemnon has reserved Cassandra for himself, in the quality of a second, or subordinate wife. He deceives her concerning the fate of Polyxena, whom, he says, is to be priestess to the manes of Achilles ; an enigmatical term, which signifies obscurely, that she has been sacrificed upon the tomb of that hero. The unfortunate mother does not comprehend his meaning. "Have I then brought her into the world," says she, to, "become a priestess of the dead ?" With exclamations like these, she interrupts Talthybius at every new circumstance he informs her of. At length, after telling her that Andromache is fallen to the lot of Neoptolomus, the son of Achilles, he declares to her that she herself is to be the slave of Ulysses. This last stroke is worse than death to Hecuba. Ulysses, whom she hates and despises : he whom she had seen a suppliant at her feet is now to be her master : her miseries have reached their summit by this fatal decision : she sends forth loud cries ; she sheds a torrent of tears. The Chorus also, uncertain what is to become of them, are not less affected. At length Talthybius prepares to carry Cassandra to the ships.

Meantime a great light is seen in the tent where that princess is confined. Talthybius begins to fear that the Trojan ladies are burning themselves in despair. He runs eagerly to the tent ; he causes the doors to be forced open, and finds his mistake. Cassandra comes out, with a lighted torch in her hand, like a Pythonesse, animated with the inspiring God. She fancies she is before the altar of Hymen, and she sings a sort of epithalamium, to celebrate her marriage with Agamemnon ; but it is a song full of wild transports. "Weep, oh mother, says she, weep, for thy husband and thy country ! as for me, I am employed in invoking Hymen and Hecate." Hecate is the Goddess of justice and revenge.

The queen and the Chorus endeavour to compose Cassandra. Full of her prophetic frenzy, she goes on, "No, it is not Apollo, it is Agamemnon, who espouses me: I accept his hand; but his death and the destruction of his family shall be the price of this marriage*: I will revenge my slaughtered father, and my brothers." In a word, she foretels all the misfortunes the Greeks are to suffer: here again is their punishment anticipated. Then recovering from her enthusiastic fit, she comforts Hecuba, her mother, by drawing a comparison between the fate of Troy and the still more dreadful one of Greece. The conquerors, she tells her, are more wretched than the conquered, without reckoning the miseries which the sacrilegious marriage of Agamemnon will bring upon them. This dear hope of vengeance consoles Cassandra, and renders even her marriage with Agamemnon pleasing. She regards her own death as a trifle, provided Troy is revenged.

Talthybius, who is present, treats the predictions of Cassandra, as so many dreams of a disordered imagination: he urges her to go with him to the ships, saying, that Hecuba herself must soon follow Ulysses. "No, answers Cassandra, she will not follow Ulysses. How then would my oracles be fulfilled? Hecuba shall die in Troy †; and thou, miserable Ulysses, thou art ignorant of the woes that wait thee. Ten years shalt thou wander upon the ocean, exposed to the cruelties of the Cyclops, ‡ to the magick of Circe, and to the rage of Charybdes. Desolate and alone shalt thou return to thy native country, and there meet with nothing but confusion and disorder. Then shalt thou think our misfortunes blessings, compared with thine own woes. But no more: I am silent. Let us go, lead me to the ships; hasten this marriage which I am to solemnize in the shades. And thou, haughty Agamemnon, triumph in vain over thy conquest. At thy return a horrible death shall be the fruits of it, and thy Cassandra herself shall be the prey of the ravenous wolves about thy bier. Ye sacred crowns, ye prophetic ornaments, dear tokens of my spotless chastity, I bid you an eternal adieu. Bear

* This prophecy we find accomplished in several of the Greek tragedies, especially in the Agamemnon of Eschylus, Act V. Vol. II. where Cassandra is also introduced with the same character.

† See the fifth act of the tragedy of

Hecuba; and the different fate of that princess, who, after having followed Ulysses on his voyage for some time, was metamorphosed into a mad bitch.

‡ See the Cyclops of Euripides, at the end of the third volume.

"them,

" them, oh Zephyrus*, to the divine Apollo. And now, where is
 " the Grecian vessel? with willing haste I go to it: nor shalt thou
 " long wait for a favourable wind; in me thou bearest a fury with
 " thee. Mother, adieu. Adieu my much loved country; and
 " you, dear manes of my father, and my brothers, soon shall you
 " see me again; but triumphant shall you see me: the ruined
 " house of the Atrides, our murderers, shall grace my death."

Hecuba, struck with this pathetic farewell, falls into a swoon, out of which she is recovered, only to lament with more force the excess of her miseries. The same objects are ever in her thoughts, the grandeur of her former state, the ancient glory of Troy, its walls overthrown, its palaces in ashes, Priam murdered at the altar of Jupiter, her sons and daughters either all killed or held in slavery. Euripides enumerates all these misfortunes; and does not scruple to declare in what this slavery consists, namely in performing the lowest domestic offices. This melancholy description of Hecuba's renews the grief of the Trojan ladies, who all make up the Interlude, by singing the funeral song, full of the same sad ideas.

ACT III.

A chariot passes over the stage, in which are Andromache, and Astyanax her son, whom the Greeks are conducting to their ships. This meeting awakens all the tenderness of Hecuba and Andromache; both weep, as if going to be separated by death. After some complaints, mingled with sighs and tears, in which the Chorus also join, Hecuba informs Andromache of the fate of Cassandra; and Andromache tells the queen that her daughter Polyxena has been slaughtered upon Achilles's tomb. To comfort the wretched mother for these repeated strokes of misery, Hector's widow tells her that the fate of those who die are far more happy than theirs. She names herself as an example of this truth; and thinks she is more to be pitied than Polyxena, since she is forced to become the wife of him, by whom all that she most tenderly loved were murdered. She describes herself in such a manner as makes her truly known for Hector's widow: solicitous but to please this illustrious husband, in this she made her whole happiness consist, and this very virtue is her ruin. Pyrrhus is struck with it: he falls in

* This farewell is extremely like that of Cassandra in Eschylus. Euripides had certainly studied the Agamemnon of that poet with great care.

love with her, and marries her. "Oh, my-dear Hector, cries she, "thou art dead, and I am doomed to become the wife of thy enemy! Ah! compared to mine, how happy is the fate of Polyxena!" Andromache knows not yet that a greater calamity awaits her

Hecuba inconsolable, but softened by the sight of Astyanax, her grandson, undertakes in her turn to comfort Andromache. She exhorts her to endure life for her son's sake at least, the only remaining branch of so many kings. "Forget Hector, says she to her, "thy grief will not call him back to life; improve the tenderness of Pyrrhus for thee: this is thy only means to preserve a son, who may one day restore Troy, and revenge us."

That instant Talthybius arrives, to bring the unhappy captives more fatal news: he finds himself unable to speak, so dreadful is his message: he begins, he stops, at length he suffers the fatal words to escape him. The Greeks demand the death of Astyanax: he is to be thrown from off the walls of Troy. This was the last stroke they had reserved for Ilion. Nothing could be better imagined, to increase the tragic interest of the action. Talthybius adds, that it will be to no purpose for Andromache to make use of prayers and supplications; the Greeks are determined and inexorable; that she must instantly obey; and that, if any injurious expression against the army escapes her, she must not expect that her son will have sepulchral rites allowed him.

"Oh! my dear child, cries the miserable Andromache, they will tear thee then from thy mother; and the name of Hector, which proved a security to so many others, becomes fatal to thee. Alas! why art thou the son of Hector? why am I his wife? I brought thee into the world to reign over Asia, not to be the victim of the Greeks. Thou weepest, my dear babe: Ah, thou seemest to have some notion of thy misery. Why dost thou cling to thy helpless mother? why seek for shelter in my bosom*? there is no safety for thee there. Hector is no more. Alas! he cannot rise from the tomb to save thee. Bereft of parents, of friends, and all support, soon must thou perish; the inhuman Greeks demand thy death. Oh! thou dear object of my maternal cares, was it then for this sad fate I gave thee suck? yet let thy wretched mother embrace thee for the last time. Oh,

* The original adds, *Like a bird beneath the wings of its mother.*

" that thou mightest resign thy breath within my arms. Barbarians, what harm hath this infant done to you? Should not his innocence disarm your rage? Oh Helen! thou fury to Greece and Troy, from Jupiter thou never couldst descend; no, thou wert produced by Demons; envy, slaughter, death, and whatever is most horrible to mankind: mayst thou suffer in thy turn, for all the woes thou hast brought upon us. Here then take my child, ye inhuman Greeks, cast him from the walls, devour him, satiate yourselves with his blood; it would be in vain to attempt to save him. Adieu. Hide in your vessel this most wretched of all mothers. The murder of my child then is the prelude to my new marriage." Here she veils her face; but when Astyanax is torn from her arms, she cries out, " Thou art to die then, my child; to be murdered in the place where thou shouldest have reigned." Astyanax is taken away. Hecuba still follows him with cries and exclamations; and the Chorus conclude this scene, by continuing their former mourning songs upon the overthrow of Troy, of which love had been the cause; and which the protection of those Deities that favoured the Trojans was not able to save.

A C T IV.

Menelaus now comes out of his tent; and declares that he has attained his utmost wishes, since he is revenged on Paris, and has it in his power to punish the unfaithful Helen, whose fate the Greeks have left him master of. He is determined, he says, to carry her back to Greece, and to sacrifice her to his resentment, and to the manes of those heroes who have perished in the Trojan war. Here Hecuba raises her eyes and hands to heaven, and blesses Jupiter for his justice in thus causing wickedness to be punished. Her prayer is remarkable for the terms in which she invokes this Deity. " Powerful mover of the universe, whose throne is the earth itself; Oh being, incomprehensible to mortals, whatever thou art, whether a nature necessarily existing, or the animating spirit of mortals, I adore thee! 'Tis thou, who by secret and impenetrable methods conductest all things according to thy will."

This prayer shews plainly, that although the ideas of the ancients concerning the Divinity were great and noble, yet they were neither uniform nor determined. We may perceive by this passage, that Euripides was a disciple of Socrates.

Helen,

Helen, by Menelaus's command, is dragged out of the tent; she asks whether she may be allowed to speak in her own justification. Her husband refuses to hear her: but Hecuba intreats him to let her say what she can in defence of her conduct, and undertakes to turn all her specious arguments against herself. This gives occasion for one of those debates, so suitable to the ancient theatre, and so much the taste of the Athenians, that there is scarce any of their tragedies in which we do not find one or more of them.

Helen begins. Her speech is extremely artificial; for she declares at first that it is not to her husband that she addresses herself, since she knows he will not be convinced by her arguments; but that, being attacked by Hecuba, she is conscious of being able to answer her. She says that Hecuba and Priam are guilty of all the fatal consequences of this war: the one for having given birth to Paris, and the other for not stifling that monster in his infancy. She relates in few words the dispute among the three Goddesses for the prize of beauty; and the judgment of Paris in favour of Venus. Helen, she says, was the reward of this decision. What would have been the consequence if Paris had adjudged the prize to Juno? That Goddess promised him the sovereignty of Europe and Asia; what then must have become of the Greeks? It was Helen's being sacrificed to the love of Paris that preserved Greece, and made the Greeks victorious over the Trojans, whose slaves they would otherwise have been. And must death, she asks, be the reward of such a benefit?

It is true that one shocking circumstance might be objected to Helen, which is her having consented to her being carried to Troy. She knows all the force of this objection; therefore she endeavours to prevent and elude it. "Paris, says she, having come to Sparta under the protection of a great divinity, Menelaus ought to blame Venus for what happened, not me; for how indeed could I resist a Goddess whom Jupiter himself obeys?" This excuse we find is not very strong, since the Greeks themselves would not admit it. She alleges one more plausible when she reproaches her husband with leaving her at so unseasonable a time. It is upon this imprudent absence of Menelaus that Ovid founded that artful epistle which he makes Helen write to Paris.

It is easy to judge what answer Menelaus might make to this reproach of Helen's, and what weight this princess's supposed justification of herself ought to have, since antiquity has handed her down as the great example of a public curse, of which, since her time there has been many instances.

She

She continues her apology almost in these terms : “ I may possibly appear guilty, since I did not quit Troy, and return to Mycenæ, when the Gods, by taking Paris from me, seemed to restore me to my former husband ; but those Gods are my witnesses, that I attempted in vain to escape. How many times have I been surprised by the guards, making an effort to get over the walls by the help of cords? Alas! contrary to my own inclinations, and contrary to the intentions of the Phrygians, I was given up to the passion of Deiphobus.” Here she lets fall some feigned tears, and asks Menelaus for what crime he condemns her to death ? and whether he intends, by punishing her, to insult the Gods, whom she makes the author of all that he reproaches her with ? The Chorus are dazzled with these reasons, but not convinced, and exhort Hecuba to revenge her children and her ruined country, by overthrowing the subtle arguments of Helen. We see by this what advantages eloquence and strength of argument had among the Athenians. Hecuba begins with defending Juno and Pallas from the unworthy charge of Helen. “ Is it credible, says she, that Juno would have ruined Argos, her favourite city, and have delivered it up to the Trojans? much less would Minerva have subjected her beloved Athens to a foreign yoke. The contention of these Goddesses for the prize of beauty was a mere fable. What advantage did Juno hope from it ? a husband greater than Jupiter ? Or, what was Pallas’s design ? marriage. Does she not fly it ? Cease, says she to Helen, to render these Goddesses the accomplices of thy crimes, or rather, to debase them in thy own justification : thou wilt find no reasonable persons will give credit to such tales. What madness to suppose that Venus would quit the skies, to accompany Paris in his voyage to Sparta, and protect and favour a ravisher ! Alas ! might she not have carried off Helen, with her palace* and her whole court, without leaving for a moment her celestial dwelling ? It was the wild passion of Paris, and thy own frailty that held the place of Venus to thee. With guilty mortals their crimes are always the decrees of heaven.” Here she adds a play of words, such as are often used among the Greeks ; and of which we have had several examples in this work. “ It is not without reason, she says, that the words *Venus* and *Madness* are alike.” †

* Demicles, a Lacedemonian city.

† Αφροδίτη *Venus*, Αφροσύνη *Stultitia*. The speech of Hecuba is very remarkable ; it confirms my system concerning the dif-

ference to be made between the real and the fabulous religion of the Pagans. See the general conclusion.

Here Hecuba presses Helen with strong reproaches upon her licentious conduct. She pleads the violence that was offered her. " But which of the Lacedemonians, resumes Hecuba, heard thee implore the aid of Castor and Pollux ? No, no, thy heart always yielded to those whom fortune smiled on. Paris brought thee with him to Troy, a war ensued, Menelaus was conqueror, and Paris was despised. If the Trojans had overcome, Menelaus would have been held in contempt by thee. Success, not virtue, always determined thy inclinations: but let us now proceed to this so often attempted escape, with which thou gildest thy pretended chastity. Thou wert prevented, thou sayst: well, death then should have been thy choice: no virtuous woman in thy situation would have scrupled to sacrifice her life to her lawful husband. But how often have I said to thee, fly, my daughter, steal secretly away from thy lover; I will find out some way to convey thee back to the Greeks; deliver us from a cruel war. But how didst thou receive this maternal advice? with insolence and contempt. Proud to reign in the palace of Paris, all thy care was to feed thy vanity with the adulation of the Phrygians: this was thy delight; and thou wert not ashamed to shew thyself in the most magnificent attire, to heighten the lustre of thy beauty, thou who oughtest to have blushed at breathing the same air with Paris."

Hecuba concludes with exhorting Menelaus to revenge Greece, and violated modesty, by putting Helen to death. The Chorus join in this request; and Menelaus promises to grant it. Helen supplicates him in vain for mercy: he will listen to her no longer, and sends her to the sea-shore to embark for Greece; but not in the same ship with him, as he had at first intended, and from which Hecuba dissuades him, fearing lest the artful Helen should, by her tears and her beauty, regain the heart of her husband, as it really happened.

The Chorus, for the interlude, continue their funeral songs. These Trojan ladies ascribe it to Jupiter, that sacrifices are abolished, altars profaned, and temples levelled with the ground. They lament their husbands, deprived of funeral rites, and their orphan children, from whom the Greeks are going to separate them for ever; and in the apprehension of that fate with which they are threatened, they wish to perish in the ocean, and imprecate curses on Helen. This interlude is more affecting than any of the former.

ACT V.

Talthybius brings Hecuba more melancholy news. Andromache, he tells her, has been obliged to embark immediately with Neoptolemus in the same vessel in which he carried the ashes of Achilles, his father. The remaining part of his message is sufficiently explained by the present he delivers to her. It is the body of Astyanax which he brings her, that she may bury it. He describes the grief of Andromache, who, bathing the body of her unhappy son with her tears, made the shores resound with her farewell to her expiring country, and the tomb of Hector. Talthybius acknowledges that he was extremely affected with this melancholy parting; and that Andromache perceiving it, confided to him this dear deposit to be delivered to Hecuba. He presents the mangled child to the old queen upon Hector's shield, which served it for a bier. A happy thought, and worthy of Euripides. Andromache conceived that she could not make any other use of this shield, which would have continually recalled to her remembrance her unfortunate husband and child.

This interesting spectacle furnishes Hecuba with matter for a beautiful soliloquy, which she pronounces while Talthybius makes preparations for the funeral of the young prince. " Set down, " (says she to those who bear the body of her grandson) set down " that shield, so capable of renewing all my sorrows. Haughty " Greece, how timid, how cruel is thy pride! did an infant then " inspire thee with such dreadful apprehensions, that thou couldst " not think thyself secure till thou hadst sacrificed this tender, victim? " My Hector, notwithstanding his valour, and the aid of so many " powerful allies, fell beneath thy sword; and yet this infant made " thee tremble, even in the midst of thy triumphs. Oh, my " Astyanax, what a fate hast thou proved! Alas! if thou " hadst attained a maturer age, thou wouldest have died in thy " country's defence. If seated on the throne of thy ancestors, thou " hadst left successors to a flourishing kingdom, thou wouldest have " been happy, if we may call that happiness whose duration is so " short. But oh, my child! though born in grandeur, thou hadst " only a glimpse of it. Alas! thy own barbarous walls have dis- " figured thy lovely face, on which thy mother used to gaze with " rapture! Oh lips! oh features! in which we traced the majestic " likeness of a father, whither are thy beauties fled? How wert " thou mistaken, my dear infant, when, hanging on my robe with

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" smiling

" smiling fondness, thou didst promise me the homage of thy offered
 " hair, and every pious duty to satisfy my shade. Alas ! it is I, who,
 " loaded with years and miseries, deprived of all my sons, and
 " doomed to bondage, that am constrained to render this sad of-
 " fice to thee. Is this then the fruit of all my cares; of so many
 " anxious nights and tender carefles? Was this the miserable end
 " thou wast doomed to? What shall I engrave upon thy sepulchre,
 " my loved child? *Astyanax was a victim to the fears of Greece.*
 " What a glorious eulogium for the Greeks! Oh, my Astyanax !
 " thou hast enjoyed neither the scepter nor any part of thy pater-
 " nal inheritance; but the shield that serves thee for a tomb is
 " the most precious of all thy possessions. Oh, faithful shield!
 " thou hast lost the hero that made thee illustrious; this burthen
 " which thou bearest now is worthy of thee."

The Chorus of Trojan ladies present Hecuba with the few ornaments they have saved out of the plunder of their former riches, to bury with Astyanax, according to custom. Here begin those funeral cries and lamentations, so frequent in the tragedies of Euripides. Hecuba and the Trojan ladies make the stage resound with their complaints; but Hecuba says one thing very remarkable for the time in which she lived. It is on occasion of this funeral pomp, so unworthy of the son of a long race of kings. " Of
 " what advantage is magnificent funerals to the dead ? It is a use-
 " less pomp, invented to gratify the vanity of the living."

This thought shews us, that at least the Pagans were not the dupes of their superstitious customs; among which, that of richly adorning their dead was one.

This funeral concert is interrupted by the sight of flames upon the towers, and on the tops of those houses that were still left standing in Troy. The Chorus perceive several Greeks running from place to place like madmen, with lighted torches in their hands, carrying fire and desolation every where. Talthybius himself appears, and declares plainly what the Chorus had only guessed at; namely, that he had given the soldiers orders to do their duty, and to compleat the destruction of Troy, by consuming the miserable remains of it. He, at the same time, warns the Trojan ladies to prepare for their departure; and tells Hecuba that she must instantly follow Ulysses. " Oh miserable that I am, cries she: this
 " is the completion of my woes! This was the last stroke that
 " fortune reserved for me. I quit my country, and I see it in
 " ashes: but let us go; let us bid it an eternal farewell. Oh Troy!

oh,

"oh my loved city! once the wonder and admiration of nations, behold thy glory is vanished, thou art a prey to the greedy flames, and we are slaves! Oh Gods! but why implore I them? So many times invoked in vain, they are deaf to my cries. 'Tis done: my honour requires it should be so. I go to cast myself in those devouring flames. Troy, burning Troy shall be my funeral pile." Talthybius stops her, and now the Queen and Chorus suppress their cries and tears for Astyanax, to deplore Ilion and all the miseries that preceded its destruction. This produces some very lively descriptions; for it seems, if the expressions may be allowed, as if they saw this city perish and expire beneath its own ruins; that they hear the crash of the falling palaces; and that Troy itself serves as a funeral pile for the carcass of Troy. Talthybius, although a Greek, is moved with this spectacle; but sighing, he obeys his prince, and leads the captives to the fleet.

The gradation observed throughout this piece is admirable. The overthrow of Ilion brings on the assembly of the Greeks in Agamemnon's tent, to decide the destiny of the Trojan ladies, the only remains of Troy. From hence it is that blind fortune, or the haughty caprice of the conquerors, prepares new miseries for these unfortunate women, in such a manner as that they all meet upon Hecuba, their queen. The death of her daughter, Polyxena, is the first stroke; but this news is concealed for some time, to torment Hecuba and her companions still more, by an uncertainty worse than the misfortune with which they are threatened. The decisions of the fatal lots are unfolded by degrees, as if to make them taste all the bitterness of their woes. Agamemnon destines Cassandra for his slave; Andromache is given to Neoptolemus; Hecuba herself falls to the lot of Ulysses; Cassandra is dragged from her to be put on board Agamemnon's ship; and from Andromache, whom the Greeks are conducting to the fleet with her son, who is still left her, the wretched queen learns the death of her daughter Polyxena; but Astyanax, that dear pledge of Hector, suspends a little the common grief: vain consolation! the Greeks send to force him from the arms of his mother, to put him to death. The Greeks abandon Helen to the rage of her injured husband: this affords the Trojan ladies some little comfort, when, immediately, to plunge them in severer anguish, they bring them upon Hector's shield, the mangled body of Astyanax, which the precipitate

cipitate departure of Andromache did not permit her to bury. Hecuba is charged with this melancholy employment, which awakens all her sensibility, and recalls all her woes to remembrance, as if her fifty sons, her husband, and her whole murdered family were united in Astyanax, the last branch of it, upon this shield. And to give the last stroke to her miseries, she sees the remains of Troy burnt before her eyes, and is herself led away as a slave to Ulysses, her most inveterate enemy. So many different incidents, but so happily connected, form one compleat action, and all lead to the same end.

THE

THE
T R O A D E S.
A

T R A G E D Y by S E N E C A.

THE name of this piece, imitated from the *Trojan Captives* of Euripides, hath given abundance of trouble to the learned, particularly to Daniel Heinlius, and before him to Joseph Scaliger. Indeed the reason appears at the first glance; for besides that Valerius Probus cites it by the name of *Hecuba*, for want of a better title; it is not very natural to imagine, that it should be known originally by the name which is now universally bestowed upon it. *Troas* signifies either the country of the Trojans, or a poem concerning Troy; or finally, a Trojan woman. So, in speaking of different countries, we say *Thebais*, *Ilias*, &c. Heinlius finds the same fault with the *Thebaid* of Seneca. These sorts of titles, drawn from the names of countries, are too general; and the ancients, the Greeks especially, were too delicate to admit of them: those who derived several tragedies from the same stories, divided into different events, in order to compose their *Trilogos*, which they called by one common title; as for example, the three tragedies which turned upon the history of Orestes, were called *Orestes*. It is this title that was given to the *Agamemnon*, the *Coepbores*, and the *Eumenides*, three tragedies written by Eschylus; to which *Proteus*, a satirical piece being joined, these four poems were called a *Tetralogus*. It is also certain that no title taken from the three Greek Poets can justify this of Seneca's; and thence we cannot but conclude that his tragedy was, and ought to be called *The Trojan women (Troades)* from the Chorus, like that of Euripides, of which it is a copy. This is the opinion of Scaliger, and of Heinlius, which is perfectly agreeable to reason; and which partly de-

determined the latter to reject the * *Thebaid* of Seneca, and degrade it to the rank which Justus Lipsius gives it among the writings of the Romans: he even goes so far as to call it the wretched poetry of a disclaimer. This is mere cavilling, as we have already observed; and the more so as Heinsius had many other good reasons to alledge, (which however he has not alledged) without having recourse to this.

But we cannot help being surprised when we find Heinsius, to add more weight to the invectives of Justus Lipsius, falling furiously upon the *Thebaid*, and placing the *Troades* in the same class with the *Medea*; that is, among those tragedies which we readily admit to be written by the great philosopher, Seneca; and this upon the authority of Quintilian, who cites a verse from the *Medea*, which he attributes to Seneca, without saying which of the Seneca's; which he would have done, says he, if it had been any other than the Philosopher. But let us hear once more what Justus Lipsius and Daniel Heinsius say; for we owe so much respect to Jos. Scaliger, as to forget that he has given the preference to the Latin tragedies, in prejudice to the Greek. And as for other criticks they have either adopted the opinions of those three I have mentioned, or have not given us their own.

" The Latin tragedies, says Justus Lipsius, are the productions
 " of different authors; and those critics who assert the contrary do
 " not merit our attention. Whoever considers carefully the stile
 " and manner of them, will be of my opinion. They who do not
 " feel this difference, feel nothing; it is too palpable. Who will
 " pretend to say that the *Oætavia* and the *Medea* were produced by
 " the same genius, and drawn by the same pencil? that the *The-
 " baid* and the *Troades* were written by the same author. No
 " one, doubtless, who has the least judgment in poetry."

Heinsius exclaims in his turn, that the *Trojan Women* is a divine tragedy, and written in divine Latin. *Troades divina, nec Latina minus.* He bewilders himself in his encomiums upon it: so strong a resemblance does he find in it, to the writings of the Greeks, and to those of Homer particularly. Of those three tragedies which he attributes to Seneca the philosopher, he asserts this to be the second in excellence, and places it between the *Hippolitus* and the *Medea*. In a word, he gives us so favourable a criticism upon it, that the

* See the *Thebaid* in this volume.

few faults he will allow it to have, he says, are either the faults of Euripides, or owing to a too faithful imitation of his manner.

But without attending to these opposite opinions of persons, otherwise so respectable for their learning, I am now going to examine, or rather to expose this poem, as well as the rest, to the criticisms of such readers as have a true knowledge of the drama; and who will judge of them by the rules of nature and good sense, and with that respect which is due to those strokes of genius which appear in the tragedies of Seneca.

This poet, whether he be Seneca the philosopher, or any other Seneca, introduces as personages in this piece, Andromache, Astyanax, Hecuba, Talthybius, Helen, and the Chorus of Trojan ladies, as in the tragedy of Euripides. To these he adds Calchas, Pyrrhus, Ulysses, an old man, and a messenger. And lastly, instead of Menelaus, he brings Agamemnon upon the stage. The place where the scene is laid, which he does not determine immediately, as the Greek poets do, is Troy in ruins.

A C T I.

Hecuba opens the scene with this sentence: “Whoever thinks “a throne is a firm possession, and a sure support, and resigns his “heart to the intoxicating joys of prosperity, as if it never was “to have an end, let him look on Troy and me.” She describes with more spirit and eloquence, than grief admits of, the overthrow of this once flourishing kingdom. “The conqueror him-“self, says she, still venerates its ruins, and with amazement views “his victory.”

“ Horret afflictam quoque,
“ Victamque quamvis videat, haud credit sibi
“ Potuisse vinci.”

She imputes to herself, and to Paris, whom she brought into the world, all the miseries that have fallen upon her: she foretold them before Cassandra did. “Oh, my country! says she, it is I “who have kindled thy flames; Ulysses and Sinon are not the au-“thors of thy woes.”

“ Prior Hecuba vidi gravida, nec tacui metus,
“ Et vana vates ante Cassandram fui.
“ Non cautus ignes Ithacus, aut Ithaci comes
“ Nocturnus in vos sparsit, aut fallax Sinon.
“ Meus ignis iste est; facibus ardetis meis.”

“ But why should I lament Troy ? ”

“ Troja jam vetus est malum.”

“ That calamity ought to be forgot amidst so many others more dreadful.”

She calls to mind her murdered sons, and the miserable fate of Priam, who was slaughtered at the altar. “ That father of so many princes, says she, had not a tomb ; and while Troy is in flames, he is without a funeral pile.”

“ Ille tot Regum parens

“ Caret sepulcro Priamus, & flammâ indiget

“ Ardente Trojâ.”

This thought, which has been greatly admired, and which, however, is nothing less than admirable, is in the same taste with a passage at the beginning, from whence Despreaux formed his judgment of the whole tragedy, and in general of the genius of Seneca. Here it follows : “ The pillar of Asia is overthrown ; Troy, the work of the Gods, to whose aid came those who drink the cold water of the seven mouth Tanais, and those who adore the rising sun, where Tygris mixes his warm streams with the ocean, &c.”

“ Columen eversum occidit

“ Pollentis Asiae, Cœlitum egregius labor :

“ Ad cujus arma venit, & qui frigidum

“ Septena Tanaïn ora pandentem bibit ;

“ Et qui renatum pronus excipiens diem

“ Tepidum rubendi Tigrin immiscet freto, &c.”

It would be tedious to give the remainder. Boileau has these verses in view in the following excellent observations.

“ * Que devant Troye en cendre Hécube désolée

“ Ne vienne pas pousser une pliante ampoulée.

“ Ni sans raison décrite en quels affreux païs

“ Par sept bouches l'Euxin reçoit le Tanaïs.

“ Tous ces pompeux amas d'expressions frivoles

“ Sont d'un déclamateur amoureux de paroles.

“ Il faut dans la douleur que vous vous abbaissiez :

“ Pour me tirer des pleurs, il faut que vous pleuriez.

“ Ces grands mots dont alors l'Acteur emplit sa bouche

“ Ne partent point d'un cœur que sa misere touche.”

At length Hecuba turns all her anxiety upon the Trojan princesses, whom the conquerors are preparing to draw lots for.

“ Dominum ecce Priami nuribus & natis legens
 “ Sortitur urna. Præda quem vilis sequar?
 “ Hic Hectoris conjugia despontet sibi,
 “ Hic optat Heleni conjugem; his Antenoris;
 “ Nec deest tuos, Cassandra, qui thalamos petat,
 “ Mea fors timetur. Sola sum Danaïs metus.”

“ The fatal urn will soon give master's to Priam's daughters: but I, the most despised part of the plunder of Troy, what tyrant am I, to follow? One flatters himself that he shall possess the widow of Hector; others wish for the widow of Helenus and Antenor. Even Cassandra, although devoted to the altars of the Gods, has Grecian lovers. It is me only whom they fear to obtain. I am become dreadful to them.” It is not very easy to understand what Hecuba means here. Would she have lovers? No certainly. Is it her boast that she has none? this must be her meaning. She congratulates herself that her conquerors dread the calamities which inevitably attend her. However that may be, in this whole act, there are no other lines which mark the subject, if this is indeed Seneca's real subject; for as we go on we find two others, namely, the sentence pronounced against Polyxena and Astyanax; that is, the deaths of Hecuba's daughter and grandson. The fate of the Trojan ladies is not declared till the end of the tragedy; and then in so few words, that it makes no impression upon us after what has passed. This change, and this duplicity of subjects, shew how little Seneca has of the spirit or regularity of his model. Euripides takes for the subject of his tragedy the fate of the Trojan captives, which continues unfolding by degrees from the beginning of the tragedy to the end, by a connexion which unites all its parts, and makes one perfect whole: here there is nothing like it. The same subject is promised; the spectator expects it, and in the course of the piece he finds it is quite out of the question: that at first it turns only upon Polyxena, and soon afterwards there is not the least appearance of her being mentioned any more, since another object is placed before his eyes; I would say Astyanax. And this without connexion, without being prepared, and without any foundation, but in the caprice of the poet, who joins together scenes in which there is no essential agreement.

It is this tragic art which Seneca wanted, and which the criticks have not condescended to examine thoroughly, to judge of the merit

merit of the Latin tragedies, either in themselves, or with respect to the Greek tragedies; but we will now resume the thread of this piece.

Hecuba now suddenly exclaims, *Lamenta ceſſant?* “ Why do “ we delay our mourning? Ye sad companions of my captivity, “ strike your bare bosoms, make the air resound with your groans, “ and celebrate the funerals of Troy.” *Et justa Trojæ facite.* The Chorus obey. “ Those, say they, whose tears thou biddest to flow, “ have long been accustomed to weep.” This beginning, and some other passages, which, contrary to Seneca’s custom, are natural and affecting, are doubtless what determined Heinlius to give the preference to the Chorusses of Seneca, rather than to those of Euripides. He would be in the right, if all was as natural and as well placed as the line I have just quoted. Here Hecuba begins the mourning with a kind of ceremony: she gives the signal to the other women, and sets the example. All of them at one instant let their hair flow dishevelled on their shoulders, tear it off by handfuls, strew ashes upon their heads, rent their robes, and beat their breasts in cadence, with every mark of grief wrought up to despair. This is a general mourning, a mourning for their whole country; and which has no example in any of the Greek tragedies. It must have been a troublesome task to the actors who played such parts, if indeed they were played. Sometimes it is for Hector, sometimes for Priam, and lastly, it is for themselves, that the women lament. “ For Priam, say they, is happy, and happy also are “ those who have not survived these calamities.” Here Hecuba goes off the stage, but why, we know not.

A C T II.

Talthybius comes to tell the Chorus that the Grecian ships cannot get out of the port for want of a favourable wind: that this misfortune is occasioned by Achilles.

Here the herald relates how the shade of that hero had appeared, and demanded that Polyxena, who had been promised to him in marriage, should be sacrificed by Pyrrhus, upon his tomb. This narration is in the true manner of Seneca. The verses are grand, though not without his usual faults; however, on the whole, this passage is beautiful, and would open the action finely, if it had been placed in the first act; and if the sacrifice of Polyxena was the subject of the play.

At

At that instant Pyrrhus and Agamemnon appear. The son of Achilles begins. "Every Greek, says he, has had his share of the spoils and captives of Troy; is it not just that Achilles should have his?" He extols the valour and the noble exploits of that hero, and concludes with these words: "Is it possible that thou canst doubt a moment whether Achilles ought to be satisfied? What! canst thou who shed the blood of thy own child in Helen's cause, think it cruelty to sacrifice the daughter of Priam to the son of Peleus?" Agamemnon answers thus: "In youth impetuosity is pardonable: with common men it is the effect of unripened years; but in Pyrrhus, it is the spirit of his father which animates him. I have with patience born the boiling temper of Achilles: moderation and affability become those best who are most distinguished. Why wouldst thou, Pyrrhus, dishonour the shade of a hero so revered, by an act of cruelty? Believe me, we ought to consider well how much is fit for the conquerors to inflict, and for the conquered to suffer. It is mildness only that renders any government durable; cruelty destroys it: when fortune appears most favourable to us, then is she most to be distrusted. My victory has taught me that it is a dreadful reverse of fate indeed which in one instant overwhelms the most flourishing kingdoms with ruin. The overthrow of Troy has too much swelled our pride; let us reflect that we are now arrived at that point from whence Troy so lately fell. As for me I acknowledge I have sometimes exceeded the bounds of a lawful authority. The insolence of success has tainted my mind; but at length that prosperity which intoxicates others has abated my pride. Priam's unhappy fate, by which at first I was too much elated, has now taught me humility, since I look upon a throne as a shining bauble which one stroke of fortune may dispossess me of, without employing a thousand ships and ten years war. Adversity comes not always so slowly. I wished (I confess it) to humble Troy; but pardon me, Greece, I would have prevented the total ruin of thy rival, if the rage of an assault and a nocturnal victory could have been restrained. All that has been done of horrid and inhuman was the work of fortune: it was darkness, so capable of exciting all the fury of the combatants, that urged these dreadful deeds: but now when our reason is unclouded, let us spare the miserable remains of Troy. Enough, and too much, have we already given to vengeance. Be assured, Pyrrhus, that I never will consent to this inhuman deed. How canst thou think of

mur-

" murdering the daughter of a king, of sacrificing her upon a tomb,
 " and with her blood bathing the insensible ashes of thy father!
 " how, how canst thou call this barbarity by the name of marriage?
 " Again I repeat it, I will not suffer a crime like this to be perpetrated.
 " Though it is the act of the whole army, the odium
 " would be mine; for he who has it in his power to prevent a
 " wicked deed, and does not prevent it, is supposed to have commanded it." This is indeed an excellent strain; if Seneca always expressed himself thus, he would cease to be himself. It is in such passages as these that Racine, who was so sensible of their beauties, has imitated him finely. In that scene in his Andromache where Pyrrhus refuses to deliver Astyanax to Orestes, he translates Seneca thus:

" + Tout étoit juste alors, la vieillesse & l'enfance
 " En vain sur leur foibleesse appuioient leur défense
 " La victoire & la nuit plus cruelles que nous
 " Nous excitoient au meurtre & confondoient nos coups.
 " Mon courroux aux vaincus ne fut que trop sévere;
 " Mais que ma cruauté survive à ma colere,
 " Que malgré la pitié dont je me sens faisir
 " Dans le sang d'un enfant je me baigne à loisir!
 " Non, Seigneur, que les Grecs cherchent quelqu'autre proye:
 " Qu'ils poursuivent ailleurs ce qui reste de Troye.
 " De mes inimitiés le cours est achevé:
 " L'Epire sauvera ce que Troye a sauvé."

" What reward then shall Achilles have? asks Pyrrhus. Glory, answers Agamemnon." He enlarges upon the barbarity of sacrificing human victims; so that Pyrrhus suffers himself to be so far transported with rage as to threaten the general. This is the exact character of Achilles's son. The dispute begins to grow warm: it produces very bitter reproaches, and some invectives, after the manner of the Greeks; but in very fine Latin. In other respects this scene is well managed, and conformable enough to the manners. Pyrrhus and Agamemnon urge very different maxims in it; but it is astonishing to see this quarrel so full of animosity on both sides terminate on that of Agamemnon, the king of kings, by sending for Calchas, to refer it entirely to his decision.

Calchas being consulted, pronounces sentence of death against Polyxena: she must be sacrificed, he says, by the hand of Pyrrhus.

* Andromaque, Act I. Sc. II.

The Gods also command, that Astyanax, the son of Hector, shall be thrown from the top of a tower: that done, the fleet will obtain a favourable wind. To this oracle Agamemnon makes no reply, and goes out.

Here indeed we find Astyanax introduced; but still there is a duplicity of action. In Euripides, the death of Astyanax, as well as all the other events, arise solely from the consultations held in the general's tent. Here his fate is pronounced by alchas we know not why, and when there is not the least room to expect it.

The Chorus, for an interlude, sing a kind of ode, of which the versification is as beautiful as the subject is impious. The design of it is to shew that the soul as well as the body dies. But why do they assert this opinion here if not to contradict the dramatic action, and to treat the shade of Achilles as a fiction? The Epicurean principles, so boldly displayed here by Seneca, has given room for many concealed impieties in the modern drama. I do not speak particularly of our own, since the drama is of all nations: but without taking upon me the character of a preacher, I may assert that it is scandalous that christians, intoxicated with the delusions of a witty disclaimer, should be tempted to assume the same tone, and to degrade the drama, by insinuating maxims which not only christianity but the mere light of reason condemn.

A C T III.

Andromache enters, holding her son Astyanax in her arms. It is he only, she says, who hinders her from following her husband to the tomb. It is from the death of Hector that she dates the æra of Troy's destruction. She relates to an old man the dream she had had the preceding night. Hector appeared before her;

* “Quantum mutatus ab illo
“Hectore qui reddit exuvias indutus Achilles!”

“But oh, how different from that Hector who returned to Troy “loaded with the spoils of Achilles!” Seneca imitates this passage of Virgil, but spoils it. Hector warns his wife to save Astyanax. This it is that alarms Andromache: her son is certainly threatened with some terrible misfortune: she tenderly embraces the child; and Hector rushing upon her remembrance, “See, cries she, the

*Eneid B. I. v. 274.

“very

"very air, the eyes of my husband." This also is Virgil copying Euripides.

* "Sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat."

Racine contents himself with translating Virgil, even when he imitates this passage of Seneca.

† "C'est Hector, disoit-elle, en l'embrassant toujours :

"Voilà ses yeux, sa bouche, & déjà son audace ;

"C'est lui-même, c'est toi, cher époux, que j'embrasse."

But to return to Andromache: it immediately occurs to us to ask why the Chorus do not tell her plainly that Calchas has doomed her son to death, since they were present at all that has yet passed, and that Andromache addressed her complaints to them. To this I know no answer that can be made, except that Seneca has thought proper to make his Chorusses speak only in the interludes between the acts, without giving himself the trouble to consider whether their presence throughout the whole action is repugnant to good sense or not.

Andromache, full of anxiety for the fate of her son, forms here one of the newest and most beautiful situations that was ever exhibited on the stage. This act only, which has no relation to any of the others, would have afforded matters for a tragedy worthy of the French theatre: and I do not doubt but Racine has oftener than once regretted that in the necessity his subject laid him under of shewing Andromache in Epirus, he could not introduce an act so finely imagined.

Euripides' idea of causing the dead Astyanax to be presented to Andromache on Hector's shield has given rise to this beautiful incident in Seneca, of concealing Astyanax while alive in his father's tomb. "Enter this monument, my dear child, says his mother to "him; why dost thou sigh? why dost thou disdain this melancholy "sanctuary? ah! in this noble pride I acknowledge the son of "Hector: he is ashamed to shew so much fear of his enemies. "Alas! this once justifiable haughtiness suits not our present for- "tune; suppress it, my Astyanax, and assume sentiments confor- "mable to thy dangers and my fears. Here are all the remains of "our former greatness, a tomb, a child, and a mother, reduced "to slavery. We must submit to these accumulated woes. Enter "then into the sanctuary of my Hector's manes. If the destinies

* Eneid. B. 3. v. 490. † Andromaq. Act. II. Sc. V.

"favour us, it will prove thy asylum; if they resolve thy death
"it will serve thee for a sepulchre."

The old man closes up the tomb, and removes Andromache to some distance, fearing lest the anxious concern of the mother should discover the retreat of the son. In the midst of this anxiety Ulysses appears. Andromache aside, and in an ardent ejaculation, conjures her husband to conceal his son in the bosom of the earth. This turn is natural and beautiful. Ulysses declares to the princess that the Greeks demand Astyanax from her; that policy requires they should free themselves from the apprehensions this prince may, one day occasion; and that the death to which he is doomed is in consequence of a resolution taken by the Greeks assembled in council, and authorised by the Gods.

Andromache pretends that this loved son has been already ravished from her. Ulysses easily perceives that this is an artifice.
"It is not now a time to dissemble, says he; where is Astyanax?"
"And where, answers she, is Hector? where is Priam? where is
"the slaughtered Trojans? Thou askest me for one, I ask thee for
"thousands."

Ulysses, less crafty, but more cruel here than in the Hecuba of Euripides*, threatens Andromache with torments and death if she does not deliver up her son. She answers with very beautiful sentences, but far removed from the simplicity of the Greek poet.
"Those, says she, who may, who ought, and who wish to die, are
"incapable of fear; if thou wouldest terrify me, threaten me with
"life; death is what I implore." It cannot be denied but that this haughty and sententious style has its beauties; but here it is not nature that speaks.

To deliver Ulysses from the apprehensions which Greece and he express on account of a child, Andromache has recourse to another stratagem: she tells him that Astyanax is dead; she even swears that he is among the dead, and in the tomb. This equivocation is well enough imagined, but it is carried too far. Ulysses, in his turn, pretends that he will go and acquaint the Greeks with this news; but he perceives in Andromache more terror and anxiety than grief. All this is expressed by a delicate artifice of the stage. He returns immediately, and congratulates her upon the death of her child, which has spared her a greater affliction, since

* See the Hecuba of Euripides, from whence this scene is partly taken.

Astyanax was to have been thrown off the only tower that was left standing in Troy. Hector's widow trembles at these words. Ulysses examines her looks heedfully, and discovers the terror which she labours to conceal. He then orders his attendants to search for Astyanax, whom his mother has certainly concealed somewhere thereabouts. He adds, that Calchas has declared that Hector's tomb must be destroyed, and his ashes thrown into the sea. Andromache, surprised by this unforeseen stratagem, falls into the snare: she ballances between her son and the revered ashes of Hector; which shall she abandon to the fury of the Greeks? This struggle would be quite in the taste of the French drama, if there was not more ingenuity than nature in it. At length she resolves to preserve her son, because he may one day revenge both Troy and his father. Accordingly, she approaches Ulysses, who had not ceased to press her. After discovering her perplexity, he directs his train to open the tomb. Andromache attempts to prevent this violation: she invokes, with loud cries, her husband's shade, but in vain. And now finding her son likely to be crushed underneath the ruins of the monument, she throws herself at the feet of Ulysses, and has recourse to tears and supplications. The king of Ithaca, before he will listen to her prayers, insists upon her delivering up Astyanax. She calls him; he comes out of the tomb, and she bids him embrace the knees of Ulysses. This scene is well worth reading; therefore I shall give it the reader entire.

* *ANDROMACHE, perceiving Ulysses.* Oh earth, open thy bosom, and thou loved shade of my Hector! deep sink thy grave, even to the black lake of Styx, and in that dark profound conceal thy son! Alas! Ulysses comes; his looks, his motion, all declare that more cruel snares are laid for me.

ULYSSES. I come, princefs, the unwilling minister of inhuman fate: but I conjure thee not to think the rigorous sentence mine. In me, assembled Greece, and twenty monarchs speak to thee. The son of Hector opposes their return into their native country, and the fates demand the sacrifice of his life. In vain is Troy overthrown: the Grecian conquest is not confirmed: an uncertain peace will

* Notwithstanding I have wholly translated this scene; yet I do not pretend to say that it is all equally worthy admiration. The reader will perceive the affection in it, and several other faults which

ought to be struck out, to render it conformable to our taste: but now the main point is to attend to the situation, which is really beautiful.

always be a source of fear. As long as the hope of the vanquished Phrygians subsist, the Greeks will ever be in arms.

ANDROMACHE. Are these the oracles of your prophet Calchas?

ULYSSES. Although his oracles should be silent, yet those of Hector would speak. I dread all that descend from him. The sons of Hector are born to emulate their father's glory. The youthful bull, which at present seems unworthy of our fears, will soon raise his tow'ring head : soon will he make trial of his strength ; his father's fierceness will revive in him, and the poor flock will be his prey *. The tender branch which escaped the ruin of its parent tree, will soon repair the loss; itself will grow a forest, and cover the earth with its shade. The spark left unextinguished may kindle again the destructive flame from whence it took its rise. I guess what thy affliction must be, princess, but grief is an interested judge ; yet weigh the reasons of the Greeks, and thou wilt pardon them. A ten years cruel war has taught our soldiers, grown old in the labours of a tedious siege, to dread even the ruins of Troy. In their opinion it cannot be laid too low ; a future Hector is to them a dreadful object : deliver us from the only obstacle that protracts our stay. Ulysses, it is true, demands a son from an afflicted mother ; but do not lay this barbarity to my charge : fate has decreed his death. In such a case I would have demanded the son of Agamemnon himself. Consider likewise, that it is but just the conquered should suffer in their turn those necessary evils which the conquerors have endured before them.

ANDROM. Oh, my child ! why art thou not still in thy fond mother's arms ? or why, at least, am I ignorant of thy fate ? No, Ulysses, though thou shouldst load these limbs with fetters ; though thou shouldst pierce this heart with innumerable darts ; though thou shouldst place me in the midst of devouring flames, never, never would I forget a mother's tenderness ! Oh, my child, my child ! what unknown region hides thee ? what is now thy fate ? dost thou wander with the rest of Troy's unhappy fugitives ? or hast thou been consumed in those flames that burnt thy country ? have the inhuman conquerors shed thy innocent blood in cruel sport ? art thou become the prey of birds ? Alas ! thy wretched mother has lost thee for ever !

* This is in the bad taste of a declaimer.

ULYSSES. Princes, this artifice is in vain: Ulysses is not to be imposed upon. The frauds of mothers, or of Goddesses themselves, deceive not him. Where is thy son?

ANDROM. Where is my son, Barbarian! Where is Hector? where Priam? where are all the Phrygians? Thou askest me for one, I ask thee for thousands.

ULYS. Princess, take heed; force us not to extort the truth from thee by harsher methods *.

ANDROM. What can those fear who may, who ought, and who desire to die?

ULYS. These haughty sentiments will vanish at the near approach of death.

ANDROM. If thou wouldest terrify Andromache, threaten her with life; death is what she wishes for.

ULYS. 'Tis well, thy prayers shall be granted; but yet this secret shall be forced from thee by the most exquisite tortures. Consider, princess, it is impossible for thee to save thy son. A mother's tenderness must yield to necessity. What madness in thee to conceal thus obstinately what thou wilt at last be forced to discover!

ANDROM. Alas! this menace is too little; place before my eyes all that ingenious cruelty can invent most horrid, to torture this weak frame, fire, steel, hunger, thirst, all the barbarity of tyrants like thyself.

ULYS. Ah, I perceive it! a mother's tenderness speaks in this bold defiance; she dares our utmost rage. But, princess, will not this very tenderness which thou expressest for thy son make the Greeks tremble for their children likewise? After so many miseries, and a long ten years war, I should fear less, had I only myself to fear for. Say, art thou not providing future wars for my Telemachus?

ANDROM. Must I then explain myself? I will. Yes, spite of my strong reluctance, I will make thee, Ulysses, and the Greeks happy in the knowledge of my woes. Flow then unrestrained, my tears; enjoy, ye Atridae a mother's anguish; and, do thou, Ulysses, bear to the Greeks the welcome tidings. This is thy custom, this is thy highest ambition. The son of Hector is no more.

ULYS. What security can I give the army that thou speakest truth?

* The original is still more brutal; but I have given the sense.

ANDROM. *eagerly.* If he be among the living, may all that the inhuman conqueror can inflict fall on my head! and, what I should think most happy for me, may instant death overtake me in my native country! So may my Hector's ashes rest in peace, as my Astyanax, my child, is laid among the dead, deprived of light, inclosed in the sad tomb, and by his wretched mother his funeral rites performed.

ULYS. Princess, it is enough. I fly to tell the Greeks that the dreaded race of Hector is now extinct, and lasting peace secured. (*Ulysses goes to a little distance, and says*) But what art thou going to say, Ulysses*? will the Greeks believe thee? canst thou thyself believe a mother in this extremity? but can she feign then, she who braves torments and death? Ah! death is then only little feared, when we have something more fatal than death itself to dread. But she has imprecated the most horrid curses on herself. Alas! should she be perjured, what worse has she to fear than what she is already condemned to suffer? Here then, Ulysses, be thyself, exert all thy wonted subtlety, now found the depth of a fond mother's heart. Ha! she is perplexed, she sighs, she groans, she weeps: now here, now there, she directs her uncertain steps; she listens anxiously to my half uttered words; her emotion is not grief, but fear. I'll try her to' the utmost. (*He approaches Andromache again.*) Princess, 'tis usual to condole with other mothers when they lose their children: but I congratulate thee upon the death of thy Astyanax; for alas! he was destined to a more cruel end. He was to have been thrown from off the only tower which now remains standing in Troy.

ANDROM. I faint, I die. My blood freezes in my veins.

ULYS. *aside.* She groans, her fear has betrayed her. (*To the soldiers*) Guards go search for Hector's son, whom a mother would in vain conceal from us. Go find, and bring him hither, this infant-foe of Greece (*apart*) 'Tis done, her secret is discovered (*To one of the soldiers*) Obey my orders, bring the child out of the place where he is hid. (*To Andromache*) Why dost thou tremble, princess? is he not dead?

* This soliloquy is a fault, in my opinion. Ulysses, which we shall come to presently, How unnatural such speeches are, that of will shew more fully. Andromache, and another spoken by

ANDROM. Would to the Gods I yet could fear for his life! but these terrors are natural to me. With difficulty we get rid of a habit confirmed by a long series of misfortunes.

ULYS. Well then, since thy son has, by an unhappy death, prevented the expiation due from the walls of Troy, since it is not possible by him to accomplish the first oracle delivered by Calchas, this is what the prophet next ordains : "The impatient fleet shall be purified, says he, and the sea be appeased by throwing into it the ashes of Hector; his tomb must be broke open." The son has escaped the fate he was doomed to; his father's sepulchre must fulfil it.

ANDROM. *aside.* What shall I do? Two loved objects divide my heart; a son, and the ashes of my husband! which shall I prefer? Oh, my Hector! I attest the cruel Gods; and yet more, thy dear manes*, my true Gods, that in my son I love thee only: that he lives but to recal thy dear image incessantly to my mind; and shall the cold relicks of my Hector be profaned and cast into the sea? Ah, rather let his son die! and canst thou, barbarous mother, canst thou consent that he should perish? wilt thou thyself urge his unhappy fate? Yes, I will suffer it, provided my dead lord be spared. Ah! what have I said? One is yet capable of feeling his misfortunes, the other lies insensible in death; his fate cannot be altered. Oh, dreadful uncertainty! yet let me resolve. Ungrateful as I am, and do I doubt then which I should give up,—and see my Hector! Ah, no! it is not he; my Hector appears not. I must decide between the two Hectors; my husband and my child. One lives, and may revenge his father. One or the other I must sacrifice; what shall I resolve on? Let me preserve him then who is dreaded by the Greeks†.

ULYS. Princess, the time presses. I must obey the oracle; this tomb must be destroyed.

ANDROM. This tomb! Ah, barbarous Greeks, with gifts I purchased from you the privilege of a monument for my Hector‡.

ULYS. This instant it shall be levelled with the ground.

* This soliloquy appears to me to be ill affected wit in this very uncommon soliloquy.
contrived: the two others of Andromache and Ulysses, which we shall soon see, will make this appear still more unnatural.

† There is in my opinion a great deal of

They must have purchased of the conqueror permission to pay the last duties to Hector,

ANDROM. Oh Gods, Achilles, Pyrrhus ! Oh son of Achilles !
thee I implore; defend thy father's gift.

ULYS. These exclamations are fruitless ! Soon shall the ruins of
this monument lie scattered over the field.

ANDROM. Inhuman Greeks, this was the only crime you have
yet abstained from. Temples, altars, Gods, even your own Gods,
you have profaned; yet your sacrilegious fury spared our tombs.
But I will myself oppose this impious violation : this weak arm
shall brave your force ; grief and indignation shall sustain me. In
me thou shalt find an Amazon, who will overthrow whole armies ;
a Bacchanal possessed with holy fury, who bounds through the
pathless forest ; who strikes, who wounds with vigour not her
own. Yes, ye barbarians I will rush among your swords, and at
least I shall have the glory to expire in defending the sacred ashes of
my husband.

ULYS. *to the soldiers.* What stops you ? is it the tears, or the
fury of a woman ? Obey.

ANDROM. Ah, rather plunge your poniards in my bosom ! He-
ctor, my dear Hector, from the gloomy regions of the dead, and re-
pulse thy impious foes ; break the eternal order of the fates ; pierce
through the earth, and kill Ulysses ; thy shade alone is sufficient.
Ah, I see thee ! thou comest terrible in arms, and darting fire around
thee. Behold him, Greeks, behold Hector, and tremble. Alas !
am I the only one who sees him ?

ULYS. *to a soldier, preparing to break open the tomb.* Destroy it
quick, raize it to the foundations.

ANDROM. *afide.* What art thou doing, unhappy mother ? wilt
thou in one ruin involve thy husband, and thy son ? Perhaps the
Greeks will be moved with humble supplications. Ah, my child
will be crushed to death with the weight of the falling tomb. If
he must die, let it be in any other manner rather than to become
a victim to his dead father. (*To Ulysses.*) Ulysses, never before was
the wretched Andromache reduced to embrace the knees of a
conqueror ; behold me now at thine, have compassion on a mother,
let my tears move thee. The higher thou art raised by the Gods,
the more compassion thou oughtest to shew to the distress. What
thou grantest to them, thou givest to fortune, to thyself. So mayst
thou be happy in the chaste affection of a faithful wife ; so may the
days of Laertes be prolonged to embrace thee at thy return ; so
may Telemachus with joy behold thee again. May all thy prayers

for him be granted ; may his years exceed his grandsire's, and his wisdom equal his father's. Have pity, oh Ulysses, on a mother ! This title is the only good I have left.

ULYS. Deliver up thy son ; then I will hear thee.

ANDROM. Come out of thy subterranean asylum ; come out, thou dear, thou only treasure which a fond mother vainly hoped to hide from the rapacious foe. See, Ulysses, the terror of thy thousand ships, a helpless child ! Oh ! give him to my prayers ; and thou, my dear Astyanax, fall prostrate at thy master's feet, embrace his knees. Think it not shameful, since fortune compels thee to it. Forget thy royal ancestors ; forget Priam, and the lustre of his empire ; forget thy glorious father. Thou art now a captive, assume the humility that suits thy condition. Ah ! if thy tender years render thee insensible to the horrors of that death to which thou art doomed, learn of a mother to weep. It is not the first time that Troy has seen the suppliant tears of an infant king ; she saw the youthful Priam weep, and the fierce heart of Hercules was moved*. Yes, that haughty vanquisher of so many monsters ; that hero who burst the gates of hell, and opened to himself an unknown road through Pluto's regions, suffered his resolution to be overcome by the soft supplications of an infant foe. Reign, said he to him : I restore the scepter to thee, ascend the throne of thy fathers ; but be more faithful to me than he was. Oh, happy Priam ! to fall into the power of an enemy so generous : imitate, ye Greeks, the moderation of Alcides. Alas ! is it his rage only that you chuse to copy ? Behold an illustrious suppliant at thy knees, Astyanax is now what Priam was then ; but he asks only life, his crown and kingdom he leaves to fortune.

The king of Ithaca, although in appearance moved with these affecting solicitations, yet tells her that the fear of one day finding in Astyanax a fatal enemy to Greece, ought to prevail over compas-

* Troy had formerly been sacked by Hercules. Laomedon, who was king of Troy, had offended Apollo and Neptune, by defrauding them of the reward he had promised them for assisting him to build his city. These two Deities, in revenge, loaded him with so many calamities, that to appease them he was obliged to expose his daughter Hesione upon a rock, from which

Hercules delivered her upon a promise of a recompence from Laomedon ; but he treating him in the same manner he had done Apollo and Neptune, Hercules besieged the city of Troy, and carried off Hesione, who was married to Telamon ; but he restored the sceptre to Priam. See Philoctetes, Vol. I.

fion. Andromache's answer in Seneca's tragedy is almost the same as in Racine's, where it is improved.

“Digne objet de leur crainte !
 “Un enfant malheureux qui ne scait pas encor,
 “Que Pyrrhus est son maître & qu'il est fils d'Hector.
 “Seigneur, tant de grandeurs ne nous touchent plus guere.
 “Je les lui promettois tant qu'a vêcu son pere...
 “Non, vous n'esperez plus de nous revoir encor,
 “Sacrez murs, que n'a pû conserver mon Hector...
 “A de moindres faveurs de malheureux prétendent ;
 “Seigneur, c'est un exil que nos pleurs vous demandent, &c.”

Andromache also, in the Latin Poet, solicits slavery for her son as a favour. Ulysses answers, that if such tender prayers are rejected, it is to Calchas, not him, that she must impute it. Hereupon the wretched mother, finding all her intreaties ineffectual, gives a loose to rage and invective: she afterwards takes leave of her son, but her parting words have nothing of nature in them. It is the situation she is in that is affecting only. She tells him that he will never be a king; never wage war against the Greeks, nor distinguish himself in the chace, in games, and in dances. All this is expressed in fine poetry, but misplaced.

“Iliaca non tū sceptrā regali potens
 “Gestabis aulā, jura nec populis dabis,
 “Victasque gentes sub tuum mittes jugum.
 “Non Graia cædes terga, non Pyrrhum trahes:
 “Non armā tenerā patria tractabis manu,
 “Sparsasque passim saltibus latis feras
 “Audax sequeris, nec statō lustri die
 “Solemne referens Troici lustri sacrum
 “Puer citatas nobilis turmas ages.
 “Non inter aras mobili velox pede
 “Revocante flexo concitos cornu modos.
 “Barbarica prisco templā saltatu coles.”

What reveries! Heinsius condemns them with great justice: but it is strange that he should charge them upon an affectation of imitating Euripides, when it is certain that Andromache utters none of these puerilities. Astyanax, in this scene of Seneca's, bemoans himself, and his mother weeps over him. “Die, says she to him, and, full of the spirit of Andromache, go to thy father Hector.” Im-

mediately she strips him of his robe, because some of her husband's ashes adhered to it, which, kissing it, she says she will carefully collect.

“ Quidquid hic cineris latet
“ Scrutabor ore.”

Ulysses carries away the child, and the Chorus conclude this act with a geographical enumeration of all the Grecian cities to which they may be led in captivity with Hecuba. Here we have Hecuba mentioned for the first time in this act; we have lost sight of her ever since the latter part of the first, without knowing what is become of her: this is a capital fault, and a strong mark of the duplicity of action in this piece; whereas, in Euripides, the whole turns upon Hecuba, who thereby unites all the events in one point of view.

A C T IV.

Here we have another proof of Seneca's want of taste for the delicate secrets of the drama, and of his negligence in studying the Greek models, which he has disfigured: in them we find the whole intrigue regularly unravelled by degrees. It is expected that Helen will appear, and the audience are interested in her fate. Here Helen enters without any preparation; and what does she come to do? why truly to act a most ridiculous part. She is no longer Helen recovered by arms, and delivered up to the vengeance of an injured husband, as in Euripides; but Helen treacherous and base, whom assembled Greece employs to carry on an inhuman fraud. Upon her entrance she says, that she is commanded to deceive Polyxena, the daughter of Hecuba; and to persuade her, that by the lot which has regulated the Grecian princes shares of the spoil, she is destined for the wife of Pyrrhus. Polyxena says not a word, but weeps; she, who in Euripides speaks so eloquently, is a mute personage here. The queen, Polyxena's mother, and Andromache, are both present, we know not how. The latter far from falling into the snare which Helen lays for them, loads her with invectives. Helen defends herself, and would have it believed that she is more miserable than the Trojan captives, since she is forced to return to an offended husband, and to lament a lover tenderly beloved. It was absolutely necessary that Menelaus should not be present when his wife reasoned in this manner: but this is not the only absurdity. Andromache obliges Helen to confess that in reality Polyxena was doomed to espouse Achilles in the shades; and by a very singular

contrast, Polyxena, who wept before, now assumes an air of gaiety, and begins to adorn herself for this new kind of marriage. "To "her the hand of Pyrrhus appeared death, and death a welcome "Hymen."

"*Mortem putabat illud, hoc thalamos putat.*"

As for Hecuba, she faints, and recovers to vent her anguish in complaints very different from those which * Euripides puts into her mouth. She even urges her daughter to rejoice, telling her that Andromache and Cassandra would envy her fate. Andromache also congratulates Hecuba upon the advantage her daughter will enjoy of being buried in her native country.

Helen says to this princess, "Thou wilt envy her destiny more, "when thou knowest thy own." She then declares to Andromache that she is given to Pyrrhus; that Cassandra is fallen by lot to Agamemnon; and Hecuba to Ulysses. This last intelligence throws Hecuba into an excess of fury: her daughter is forgot, Pyrrhus appears, and she imprecates a thousand curses upon him and the whole fleet. The Chorus, in their turn, paraphrase the following thought. "That the unhappy love to have companions in misfortune." And upon this, which is a continuation of it, "That "no one is miserable but by comparison."

"*Est miser nemo nisi comparatus.*"

A C T V.

A man comes to acquaint Hecuba and Andromache, that Polyxena is sacrificed, and Astyanax thrown from off the top of a tower. Andromache desires him to relate every circumstance of this horrid deed, that she may drink, she says, her miseries to the dregs.

"*Prosequere. Gaudet animus ærumnas meas.*"

"*Tractare totas. Ede, & narra omnia.*"

These are, indeed, very haughty expressions of grief for the tender widow of Hector. This whole narration is tedious and puerile; especially in that part where the poet describes the Greeks running eagerly to behold the death of Astyanax. Some ascend the trees, which are particularly enumerated; others clamber up

* See the Hecuba of Euripides in this volume.

to the tops of half-burnt houses. There are many more such affected ornaments of description, among which, Astyanax is compared to a young lion. Seneca also, who loves the antithesis to appear every where, instead of simply telling us that this child was the only person who forbore to weep, expresses himself thus;

“ Non flet è turbâ omium

“ Qui Aetor.”

At length Astyanax throws himself off the tower. The relater adds, that he was dashed in pieces; and Andromache, instead of weeping, wittily observes, that he was “ In this, also, too like his father.” Because Hector had been dragged by the horses of Achilles; a cold allusion, I think, for a mother in her miserable situation. The other part of the narration regards Polyxena. The place where she was sacrificed is as carefully described as the tower from whence Astyanax was cast down. The rest is fine, if we except some needless ornaments: it is the description of a funeral marriage. Helen and the Grecian ladies attend it with torches in their hands. Polyxena is represented as deriving new beauties from her unhappy fate; but when Seneca proceeds to describe the sacrifice itself, he forgets the simplicity of Euripides, and, giving way to his genius, says the most extravagant things. Polyxena is not haughty, but fierce: she does not, as in Euripides, compose her robes with decent care as she falls, but throws herself down with violence, as if expiring she would crush the tomb of Achilles with her weight: her blood streams not over the sepulchre; the greedy sepulchre drinks it. In conclusion, Hecuba, whom we might naturally expect to be overwhelmed with anguish, takes leave of the Grecian fleet with a kind of scoffing sorrow. She is doubtful which she shall first lament; her daughter, her grandson, her husband, her country, or herself. The messenger urges the captives to depart, and all go off the stage.

END of VOL. II.



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